THE SIX DAY WAR 1967: JORDAN AND SYRIA



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ILLUSTRATED BY PETER DENNIS

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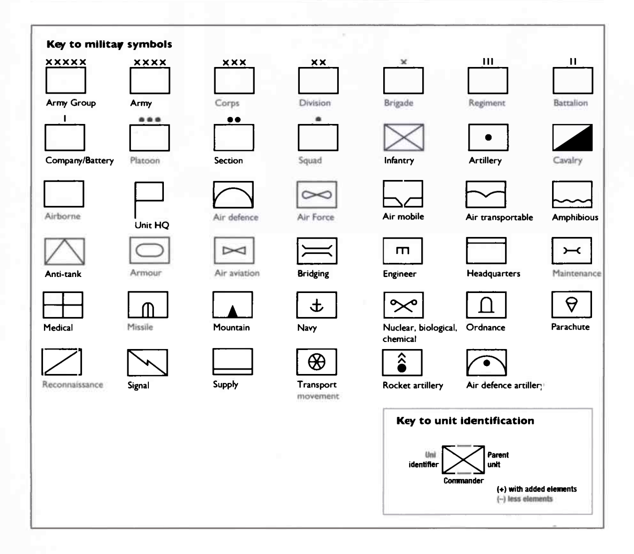
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ARTIST'S NOTE

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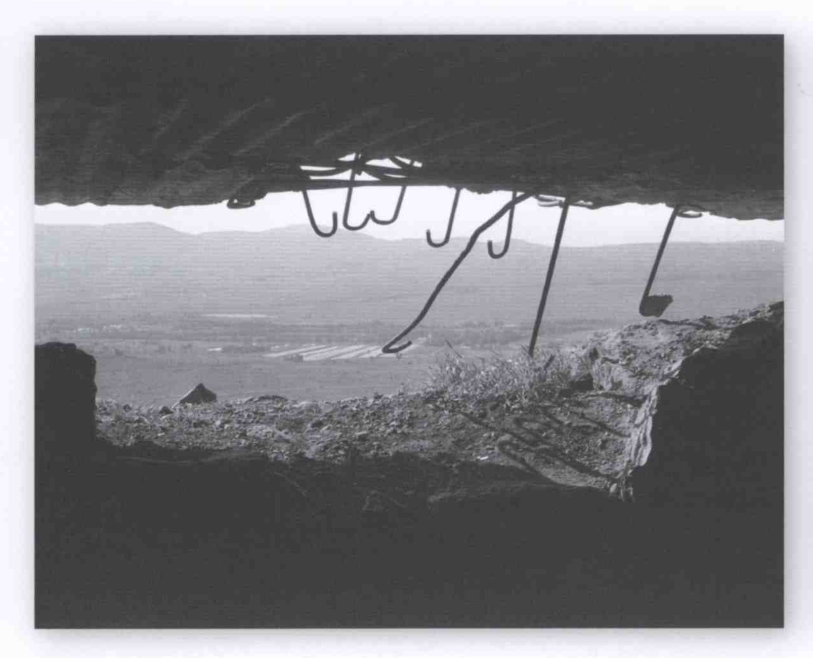
INTRODUCTION

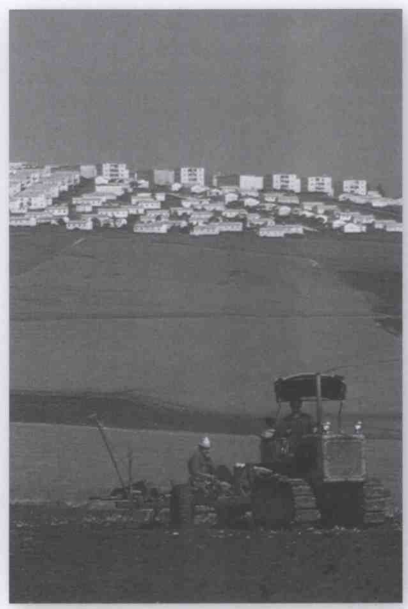
A POISONED CHALICE

The Sykes-Picot Agreement of May 1916 was a cynical exercise of European imperialism for the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire following World War I. With Russian connivance, Great Britain and France divided up the Middle East into respective spheres of influence drawn from the wreckage of the Ottoman Empire that had ruled the region for over 400 years. With scant regard for cultural, religious or ethnic boundaries, whole new countries were created at the stroke of a bureaucrat's pen in Whitehall or the Quai d'Orsay. Previous pledges for the creation of a pan-Arabic nation to the Arab leaders that had fought on behalf of the Allies against the Central Powers were cast aside. The British Government further complicated matters with the Balfour Declaration of November 1917 that laid the foundation for a Zionist state in Palestine. Jews and Arabs were thrust together in a cauldron of mutual suspicion and antagonism under British rule in the Mandate for Palestine as legitimized by the League of Nations. In 1921, the British divided its mandated area into two political entities with the 'Emirate of Transjordan' (later Jordan) to the east of the Jordan River and Palestine to the west. To the



For years several World War II German PzKpfw IV tanks dominated the Israeli settlements and towns along the Galilee Finger, such as this one at the Tawfik position, which fired periodically on Kibbutz Tel Katzir and other targets on the Sea of Galilee.





LEFT
The Golan escarpment along the Israel–Syria border was dotted with scores of bunkers that were capable of engaging the Israeli settlements on the Huleh Plain below with heavy machine-gun fire throughout the hours of daylight, making any farming an extremely hazardous business.

RIGHT
From the time of the War of Independence, the Israelis greatly expanded their settlements and kibbutzim along the northern borders with Lebanon and Syria. They also conducted a concerted campaign known as 'political agriculture' that caused endless disputes and frequent military actions along the border region.

north were the recently formed countries of Lebanon and Syria that were under French control. In the 1880s, Jewish emigration to Palestine began in earnest. Following a Royal Navy bombardment of Alexandria in July 1882, Great Britain occupied Egypt in order to maintain control of the Suez Canal. Europe's stranglehold on the region was paramount.

In 1923, the British transferred the Golan Heights together with the headwaters of the Jordan and Banias rivers from Palestine to the French Mandate of Syria. This arbitrary act was to have long-lasting repercussions. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, many thousands of Jews escaping Nazi persecution in Europe emigrated to Palestine causing further friction among the indigenous Arabs. Both factions wrestled for dominance under an increasingly reluctant British administration. On 2 April 1947, the British Government informed the United Nations (UN) that it intended to relinquish the British Mandate for Palestine in May 1948. Accordingly, the UN decided to partition Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab one, with Jerusalem becoming an international city under UN administration. With the departure of the British, the nation of Israel was created on 14 May 1948. In the following days, the region was plunged into open conflict. In consequence, the UN partition plan was never implemented leaving many border anomalies and disputes to be resolved by force.

The First Arab-Israeli War was prolonged and bitter. The Arabs failed in their desire to eliminate the nascent nation of Israel. Only Transjordan achieved its immediate war aims of occupying the ancient Jewish biblical lands of Judaea and Samaria, later annexed by Jordan in 1950 as the West Bank. Similarly, Egypt occupied and administered the Gaza Strip. Syria encroached on to the eastern shores of Lake Tiberias (Sea of Galilee) and laid claim to a proportion of the lake and its fishing rights, which the Israelis insisted were exclusive to them. Nevertheless, Israel increased its land area by almost 50 per cent over that ordained by the original UN partition plan. Yet Israel remained extremely vulnerable to attack being just 14km (nine miles) wide at its narrowest point with the capital of Tel Aviv within artillery range of the West Bank. In particular, the escarpment of the Golan Heights towered over the agricultural settlements



The Banias Falls on the Golan Heights is an idyllic spot, but it has been the cause of much conflict between Israel and Syria since its waters feed into the Jordan River that is vital for Israel's survival. Syrian attempts to divert the Banias and Liddani rivers were a significant factor in the outbreak of war in June 1967.

to the north of the Sea of Galilee (also known as Lake Tiberias or Lake Kinneret) – at 209m (686ft) below sea level it is the lowest freshwater lake in the world. From these commanding heights some 1,000m (3,280ft) above sea level, the guns of the Syrian Army covered great swathes of prime agricultural land and the many kibbutzim that were fundamental to the philosophy of the Zionist cause. As a popular saying of the time went – 'Israel is like a sausage, easy to cut up'.

THE STRUGGLE FOR LAND AND WATER

Dotted along the disputed border between Israel and Syria were several UN-decreed demilitarized zones (DMZ), since their sovereign status had not been fully resolved by the UN prior to the armistice of 20 July 1949 when they were still occupied by the Syrians. Although small in size, just 170 square kilometres (66 square miles), these became a source of serious friction between the two countries once the Syrians were obliged to vacate them under international pressure. To the Arabs, these were neutral intermediate buffers where neither side was allowed a full-time presence. However, to the Israelis these areas were seen as Israel's sovereign national territory with solely an obligation for them to be demilitarized. By this interpretation, it was permissible to undertake farming in the various DMZs, which acquired fanciful names such as De Gaulle's Nose, the Bean Patch or the Beetroot Lot. Over time, the Israeli farmers encroached into virtually every DMZ in a concerted campaign known as 'political agriculture'. Since Syria was essentially a feudal society with most agricultural land owned by absentee landlords, the Syrian peasants had neither the inclination nor means to farm such land themselves. These DMZs were contained in an area called the Galilee Finger as it stretched from the Sea of Galilee in the south up to the Lebanese border in the north with the Golan escarpment to the east. From there Syrian guns dominated the Sea of Galilee including the towns of Tiberias, Rosh Pina, Safed and Qiryat Shimona as well as 56 settlements and



During the 1950s and early 1960s, there were numerous terrorist attacks against Israel from its neighbouring countries causing many deaths and hundreds of wounded. Here, two fedayeen infiltrators lie dead after killing an Israeli agricultural tractor driver at Kibbutz Ein Hashlosha on 25 January 1955.

kibbutzim. These were intermittently shelled as Israeli armoured tractors ploughed, sowed and harvested inside the DMZs, and ever closer to the actual borders. In retaliation, the IDF responded with artillery fire or even air strikes in a never ending round of tit for tat. Syrian bombardments waxed and waned depending on the prevailing political situation in the country as coup followed coup: 15 military coups between 1949 and 1966. To the south-east of the Sea of Galilee, there was a further DMZ where the Israelis had established the kibbutz of Ein Gev, close to the Syrian border, which was constantly harassed from the escarpment above. Nevertheless, many of the clashes along the border were initiated by Israeli acts of 'political agriculture'. As General Moshe Dayan candidly revealed in an interview in 1976 when he admitted that Israel had been responsible for '... at least 80 per cent of the clashes that had occurred in the DMZs between 1949 and 1967'.

The second contentious issue with Syria was over the matter of water. As Israeli agriculture flourished, so the need for more water grew. This became even more acute when Israel decided to irrigate large expanses of the Negev Desert in the far south of the country. The National Water Carrier, or Ha'movil Ha'artzi, was created to channel fresh water from the Sea of Galilee to the Negev and all points in between via a series of canals, tunnels, reservoirs and pumping stations. The scheme was completed in June 1964 and began pumping water at the rate of 1.7 million cubic metres a day with 80 per cent for agriculture and 20 per cent as drinking water. Since the headwaters of the Hasbani and Banias rivers are situated in Lebanese or Syrian territory, this diversion of 'Arab' water was deemed to be a hostile act as it was feared that a blossoming Negev would allow more millions of Jewish immigrants to live in Israel. In retaliation, the Arab summits convened in January and September 1964 created the Jordan Diversion Authority, whereby these rivers were to be dammed and diverted so depriving Israel of life-giving water. However, as soon as any plant equipment began earthmoving operations, it was subjected to Israeli artillery and tank fire. These actions led to four major border clashes on 17 March 1965, 13 May 1965, 12 August 1965 and 17 July 1966, in what

became known as the Water War. At the outset, Israeli tanks were largely ineffective against these distant targets because of inadequate training. The recently appointed commander of the Israeli Armored Corps (IAC), Brigadier-General Israel Tal, soon instituted rigorous operating procedures and by the end of the Water War his tanks were hitting bulldozers at a range of 11km (seven miles). Such expertise forced the Syrians to move their operations ever further upstream but they were unable to elude the long arm of the Israeli Air Force (IAF) and eventually they gave up their diversion plans all together. Even so, the division of water resources remained and remains a persistent source of friction[1]. Brigadier-General Ariel Sharon, subsequently Minister of Defense and Prime Minister of Israel, had no doubts about the significance of these events, 'People generally regard 5 June 1967 as the day the Six Day War began. That is the official date. But, in reality, it started two and a half years earlier – on the day Israel decided to act against the diversion of the Jordan River.'

FATAH AND FEDAYEEN

For the majority of Israelis, the most intractable problem with Syria lay in its support for terrorist organizations that were allowed to operate from its territory against targets in Israel. The most dangerous of these was al-Fatah. Meaning 'Conquest by Jihad', the group was founded by an engineer named Yasser Arafat and fellow Palestinian exiles in Kuwait in 1959. Disheartened by the lack of decisive action by the Arab nations in the confrontation with Israel, Fatah was resolved to take the fight directly to the enemy. As an engineer, Arafat realized the significance of the National Water Carrier and the first sabotage mission conducted by Fatah on 2 January 1965 was directed against a water-pumping station: it failed. Fatah was sponsored and supported by Syria with the majority of its training camps based there. However, Syria discouraged Fatah from mounting terrorist attacks directly from its territory for fear of Israeli retaliation. Egypt similarly denied permission for Fatah to operate from its territory. Accordingly, most raids were conducted from Jordan and Lebanon and those countries bore the brunt of Israeli reprisals. In 1965, there were 31 Fatah raids against Israel of which 27 were launched from Jordan. It was part of Fatah's strategy of 'entanglement' whereby its repeated terrorist attacks would force Israel to respond aggressively towards those countries sheltering its fighters, thus escalating animosity between Israel and her Arab neighbours. Furthermore, any Israeli reprisal raids increased the hostility of the Palestinian population both towards Israel and to the host nation for its inability to protect the people from the hated Zionists. These inevitably resulted in repressive measures being taken against the 'fedayeen' (freedom fighters) to forestall more Israeli attacks but this only further compromised the popularity and legitimacy of the governments in question, notably Jordan which had the longest border with Israel. Over time, such actions seriously weakened King Hussein's position in the eyes of the Palestinians.

With 1,028km (639 miles) of hostile borders, Israel was hard pressed to defend its frontiers against infiltration. Between 1948 and 1957, 486 Israelis died at the hands of terrorists and a further 189 in the years up to 1967. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, many of the fedayeen attacks were hardly more

1. Following the peace treaties of 1979 and 1994 between Israel and Egypt and Jordan respectively, the latter two countries renounced the use of force against Israel except under one specific condition and that was they reserved the right to go to war over water resources.

A pair of Israeli Navy motor torpedo boats patrols the Gulf of Aqaba towards the Straits of Tiran with MTB 151 *Shva* in the background. It was the closure of these straits by the Egyptians to Israeli shipping on 22 May 1967 that was one of the principal causes of the Six Day War. On 8 June, Israeli torpedo boats and aircraft repeatedly attacked the American intelligence gathering ship USS *Liberty*, which they apparently mistook for an antiquated Egyptian naval supply vessel, *El Quseir*. American casualties were almost two-thirds of the ship's company with 34 killed and 172 wounded in a tragic incident that has never been fully resolved to this day.



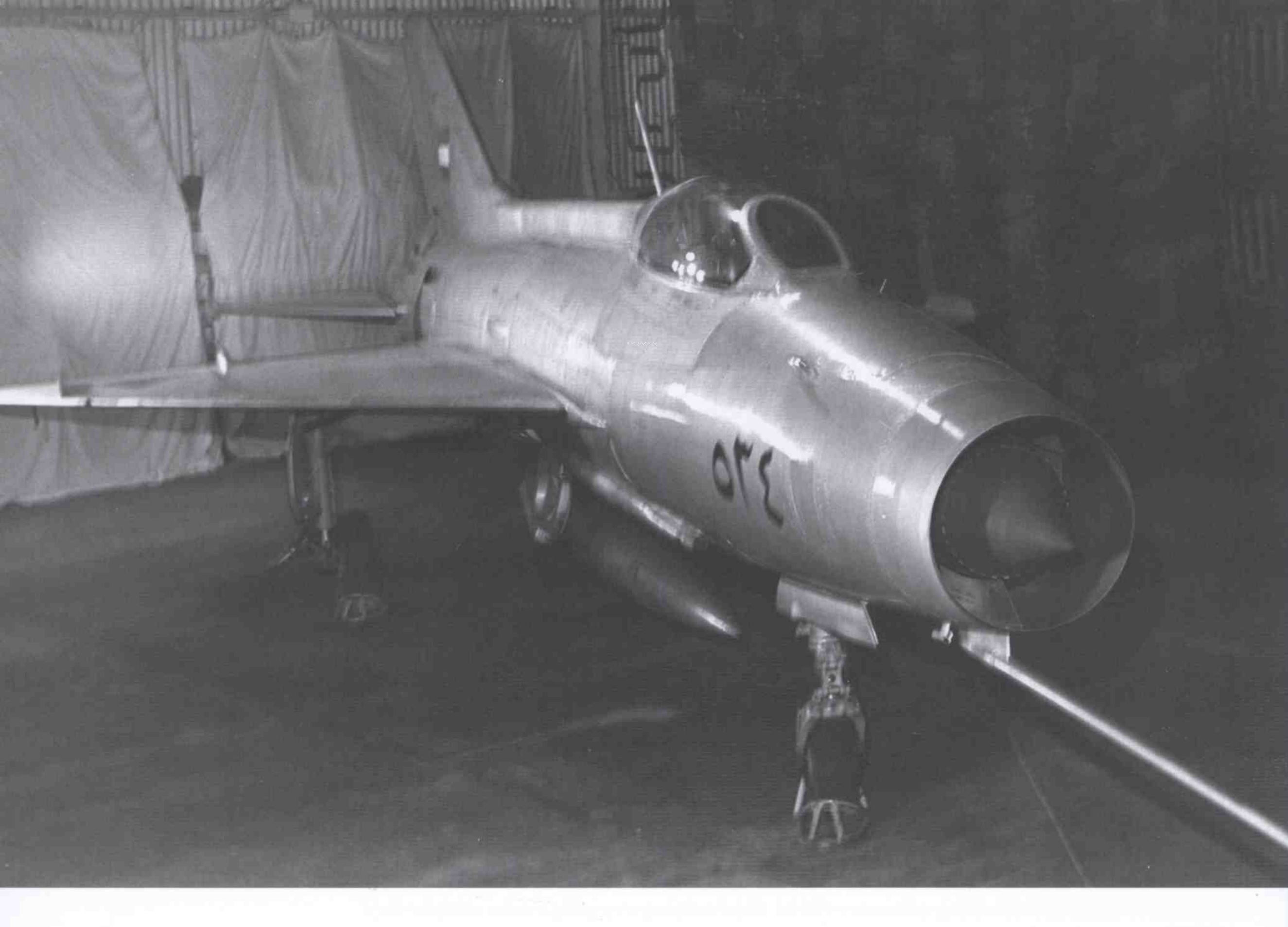
than nuisance raids since they often involved the theft of cattle and agricultural equipment for use by farmers in the impoverished West Bank. But with the emergence of Fatah these raids became more deadly as the fedayeen were equipped with better weapons and explosives by the Syrians. This was part of its strategy of waging a 'popular war of liberation' against Israel following the growing trend of revolutionary wars around the world, most notably in Vietnam, Algeria and the Congo. It was a war by proxy as the Syrians did not want to fight Israel directly but wished to be seen at the forefront of the struggle for the restoration of Palestine within the Arab world. This was anathema to Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser, President of Egypt and the self-professed leader of the pan-Arabist movement to unite the various Arab countries under his firm guidance. He convened a summit of Arab leaders in January 1964 in Cairo. The principal purpose of the summit was to reassert Nasser's authority within the Arab League. Thereafter, the decision was taken to form the Jordan Diversion Authority to deny water to the Israelis. The Hasbani River in Lebanon was to be diverted westwards to the Litani River to irrigate much of southern Lebanon while the Banias River in Syria was to be diverted by a canal through Syria to the Yarmouk River in Jordan. Secondly, a Unified Arab Command (UAC) was created to provide the necessary military protection for the Jordan Diversion Authority to undertake its comprehensive engineering works. The provisions of the UAC allowed the forces of one Arab country to be stationed in the territory of others: an absurd notion given the paranoia of most Arab leaders. It was also ordained that the Arab nations within the UAC should standardize on Soviet military hardware for common interoperability. This was of little consolation to Jordan, which was equipped almost exclusively with British and American weapons. Furthermore, all armies within the UAC were tasked with containing 'Zionist expansionism' until such time as the UAC would orchestrate the offensive to destroy the 'Zionist entity', which was scheduled for the year 1967. Such pronouncements were guaranteed to provoke Israel but not so much as the final resolution of the Cairo summit.

Since the Fatah movement was becoming a tool of Syrian manipulations, Nasser wished to bring it under his control through a new overriding authority to be known as the Palestine Liberation Organization or PLO. Together with a Palestine Liberation Army (PLA) equipped with conventional, albeit antiquated, arms, the PLO was to oversee all fedayeen operations against Israel under the implicit yet deniable direction of Egypt until such time as the Arab world rose up in concert against the 'Zionist entity' when the time was ripe. Yet Syria was unwilling to relinquish such a potent tool in its 'popular war of liberation' against Israel particularly as Fatah was becoming increasingly recognized by many dispossessed Palestinians as their foremost champion in their desire to return to their homelands. Furthermore, Yasser Arafat and the Fatah leadership had no time for such an artificial construct as the PLO and immediately began to undermine its authority. Yet to the Israelis it was another arrow aimed at the heart of the Jewish nation that had been forged at such expense in blood, sweat and tears since the Holocaust.

THE SYRIAN SYNDROME

It is undeniable that the Israelis had a particular antipathy towards the Syrians. Initially, the Egyptians had fought stoutly from prepared positions during the Sinai Campaign of 1956 and the Jordanian Arab Legion was accorded due regard because of its prowess during the War of Independence. However, the Syrians did not garner any respect as they never stood and fought but merely bombarded hapless Israelis from their dominating heights with relative impunity. It was a situation that successive Israeli governments were unable to resolve but the continuing pressure from the farming communities within the Galilee Finger remained intense. Yet the Syrian Army was the least effective within the Arab coalition. This was largely due to the notion that service in the military was not a fitting career within Syrian society. But over the years it became a stepping stone into politics and therefore positions of power and influence. In consequence, the armed forces attracted significant numbers of officers from poor and underprivileged levels of society keen to acquire an education and advancement, although not necessarily in the field of arms. These same officers tended to be more radical in their political outlook and readily attracted to the emerging secular Ba'ath Party, Ba'ath meaning 'rebirth'. Being socialist in concept, the Ba'ath Party soon became entwined with the Soviet Union and, once it assumed power in a military coup in March 1963, the Soviets backed the Ba'athists with finance and modern weapons. Since the new regime was drawn mainly from the minority Alawite sect of Shi'ite Islam, it was necessary to impose its will upon the majority Sunni Muslim and Druze populations of Syria. And the easiest way to do that was to promote an overriding external threat to unite the disparate factions within Syria and the obvious means was to heighten confrontation with Israel.

For its part, Israel was not adverse to meeting the challenge. The Northern Command of the IDF (Israel Defense Forces), together with the IAF, took up the gauntlet. Successive Chiefs of Staff of the IDF and the GOCs of Northern Command took increasingly hardline stances against the Syrians, leading to the Water War of 1965/66 and heavier reprisal raids, as a result of Fatah attacks within Israel. On 13 November 1966, the IDF mounted their first daylight incursion into Jordan against the village of Samu in the Hebron Hills from where several terrorist attacks were launched into Israel. Operation *Shredder* was the



On 16 August 1966, a MiG-21F-13 of No. 11 Squadron, Iraqi Air Force, landed at Hatzor airbase in Israel. The pilot, Captain Munir Redfa, had been bribed by Mossad to defect together with his supersonic jet in a sting codenamed Operation *Diamond*. The MiG-21 was extensively tested by all the fighter squadrons of the IAF to discover its strengths and weaknesses in aerial combat. This data was exploited ruthlessly by the Israelis culminating in the shooting down of six Syrian MiG-21s on 7 April 1967 over the Golan Plateau, an event that led directly to the Six Day War.

largest IDF military undertaking since the Sinai Campaign of 1956 comprising a force of some 3,000 troops, 11 Centurion tanks and 60 M3 half-tracks, backed by the IAF. It resulted in a fierce skirmish with the Jordanian army and scores of casualties. Operation *Shredder* led to widespread international condemnation of Israel for the disproportionate use of force and even criticism within Israel for not attacking the real target of Syria. It proved to be a disaster for King Hussein of Jordan, with serious riots in the West Bank and unrest throughout the country threatening to topple his throne. He in turn blamed Syria for supporting Fatah and Egypt for 'hiding behind the skirts of the United Nations forces' along the Egyptian border with Israel when a brother Arab country was invaded in broad daylight. For the self-professed leader of the Arab world, Nasser, this was a mortal insult. Yet with much of his army bogged down in a disastrous campaign in Yemen and the economy in tatters, there was little Nasser could do except ramp up the rhetoric of hate against Israel.

Furthermore, the Syrians remained unpunished and the shelling of Israeli settlements continued unabated. It gave rise to what became known as the 'Syrian Syndrome'. Colonel Yisrael Lior was the military secretary to Prime Minister Levi Eshkol and an acute observer of both the military and political establishments. He states: 'It always seemed to me that Yitzhak Rabin suffered from what I call the Syrian syndrome. In my opinion, Syrian syndrome afflicted everyone who ever served on the Northern Command lines … service on this line against the Syrian enemy inflamed extraordinary feelings of hatred towards the Syrian Army and people. The Israeli attitude toward the Syrian Army seems to me far removed from the attitude toward the Jordanian or Egyptian army. … We loved to hate them. Rabin and Dado [Brigadier-General

David Elazar] were very aggressive in the fighting that was taking place over the water sources in the north.' The mutual animosity all came to a head on 7 April 1967.

Early in the morning two armoured tractors began ploughing the fields of Kibbutz Gadot close to the Syrian border. Within minutes, they were engaged by Syrian artillery and heavy machine guns. The IAF responded by bombing the gun positions. The Syrians in turn sent up fighters to intercept the attacking aircraft. In the ensuing aerial battle, six MiG-21s were shot down without loss to the Israelis, with two of the MiGs being destroyed over the outskirts of the Syrian capital Damascus. It was a complete humiliation for the Syrian armed forces and a clear indication of their competence in battle, even with the latest Soviet equipment – a fact not lost on the IAF. Both Operation *Shredder* and the battle of 7 April were potent demonstrations of the power and might of the IDF. Both Jordan and Syria demanded concerted action from Egypt. Backed by spurious intelligence reports from the Soviets that approximately ten Israeli brigades were massed on the border and about to invade, the Syrians called on the Egyptians to abide by their mutual defence pact of November 1966. The Soviet intention was to persuade Egypt to threaten Israel from the south and thus distract the IDF from taking further actions against the Syrians. This would strengthen the Ba'athist government in Damascus as well as the Soviets' position in the Middle East: in particular the use of Syrian ports as a warm-water anchorage for the Soviet Navy in the Mediterranean Sea. Against his better judgement, Nasser instituted a series of measures that led inexorably to outright conflict.

CHRONOLOGY

1958

1 February Egypt and Syria combine in an alliance to become the United Arab Republic to threaten Israel from north and south.

1959

Summer Fatah movement founded by Yasser Arafat and other Palestinian exiles to conduct attacks inside Israel.

18 November Israel begins National Water Carrier project to divert water from the Sea of Galilee to the Negev Desert.

1961

28 September Syria secedes from the United Arab Republic although Egypt retains the title thereafter.

1962

September Nasser becomes involved in the Yemen Civil War with over 60,000 Egyptian troops deployed in a prolonged and costly campaign that has an increasingly demoralizing effect on the Egyptian armed forces.

1963

8 March Military coup by army officers of the National Council of the Revolutionary Command assumes power in Syria as part of the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party.

1964

13–17 January First Arab summit in Cairo declares formation of the Jordan Diversion Authority, the Unified Arab Command (UAC) and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

May The PLO formally founded together with the Palestine Liberation Army (PLA) with the official aim of destroying Israel.

5 June	Israel begins pumping water from Sea of Galilee to Negev Desert.

1965

2 January	First Fatah raid inside Israel. Thereafter Fatah mounts some 122 raids against Israel up to 5 June 1967.
Summer	Water War is fought between Israel and Syria to prevent the diversion of the Jordan River headwaters.

1966

23 February	Another military coup in Syria leads to increased confrontation along the Israeli–Syrian border.
7 July	The IAF destroys Syrian plant equipment and Jordan River diversion scheme is abandoned.
16 August	An Iraqi pilot defects to Israel with a MiG-21 fighter giving the IAF invaluable insight into the most potent aircraft in the Arab air forces.
11 October	Syrian government affirms support for Fatah leading to more terrorist attacks against Israel as part of the 'war of liberation'.
9 November	Egypt and Syria sign a mutual defence treaty. Thereafter, the Soviet Union provides the Syrian armed forces with large quantities of modern weapons.
10 November	Three Israeli soldiers are killed on patrol south of Hebron.
13 November	In retaliation, IDF mount Operation *Shredder* against the Jordanian town of Samu destabilizing the government of King Hussein.
14 December	Field Marshal Amer, C-in-C of the Egyptian Army, advises Nasser to close the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping and expel the United Nations Emergency Force from Gaza.

1967

7 April	After heavy exchange of artillery fire along the Golan Heights, fierce aerial combat results in the IAF shooting down six Syrian MiG-21 fighters.
7 May	Heavy shelling of Israeli positions inside demilitarized zones along Syrian border.
11 May	Prime Minister Levi Eshkol warns of further reprisals against Syria.
12 May	Similar provocative remarks by IDF Chief of Staff Major-General Yitzhak Rabin are interpreted by Arabs as Israeli intention to undertake regime change in Syria.

13 May	With the intention of provoking Nasser to confront Israel, the Soviets falsely inform the Egyptians that Israel intends to invade Syria on 17 May.
14 May	Egypt begins moving troops into the Sinai Peninsula.
15 May	Israel's Independence Day Parade held in Jerusalem.
16 May	Egypt and Syria begin mobilization of reserves. Nasser also demands that the United Nations Emergency Force on the border between Rafah and Eilat must leave. IDF begins mobilization of reserves.
17 May	Jordan begins mobilization. Syria announces the country is in a 'state of combat readiness'.
18 May	Kuwait and Iraq mobilize their armed forces.
19 May	UNEF departs Sinai Peninsula.
20 May	First phase of IDF mobilization is complete.
21 May	General call-up of IDF reservists is officially announced.
23 May	Nasser closes the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping and foreign ships carrying strategic materials to Israel such as oil. To Israel, this action is a *casus belli*.
24 May	Jordanian mobilization complete and permission is given for Iraqi and Saudi Arabian forces to enter Jordan.
25 May	Israel dispatches diplomatic mission to Washington, DC. All 13 countries of the Arab League declare support of Egyptian actions in confrontation with Israel.
26 May	The United Nations fails to gather international support to open the Straits of Tiran. Soviet Union warns Egypt against starting hostilities.
29 May	The PLA in the Gaza Strip fires on Nahal Oz kibbutz. Crisis within the Israeli government as the IDF hierarchy demands immediate action.
30 May	Jordan joins defence pact with Egypt and Syria, with Jordanian forces coming under Egyptian command.
1 June	Government of National Unity formed in Israel.
2 June	General Moshe Dayan joins Israeli cabinet as Minister of Defense.
3 June	Israeli government decides on war and pre-emptive strike against Egypt. As yet there are no plans to attack Jordan or Syria. Iraq joins Egypt–Jordan military pact.

4 June	Iraqi and Saudi forces arrive at Jordanian border. Israel advises Jordan that the IDF will not attack West Bank or Jerusalem unless Jordan opens hostilities.
5 June	IDF launches pre-emptive strike against Egyptian Air Force and initiates ground campaign in Sinai Peninsula. Jordanian forces begin artillery bombardment of Israel. IDF retaliates with invasion of West Bank. Syrian Army undertakes minor incursion of Israeli positions. IAF attacks and destroys Jordanian and Syrian air forces.
6 June	IDF achieve considerable success in Sinai and Egyptian Army begins disorganized retreat. IDF achieve considerable success in West Bank and Jordanian Army begins retreat from West Bank. Syrians conduct artillery bombardment along Israeli border.
7 June	IDF reach Gidi and Mitla passes in Sinai. IDF capture Jerusalem and Jericho. Jordanian Army in general retreat. Syrian Army continues artillery bombardments.
8 June	IDF reach Suez Canal. IDF capture Hebron. Egypt accepts UN ceasefire. IAF pounds Syrian positions on Golan Heights in retaliation for Syrian artillery barrages.
9 June	IDF begin ground operations against Syria.
10 June	IDF complete capture of Golan Heights and ceasefire is agreed for 1800hrs. The Six Day War is over.
12 June	IDF troops occupy the strategic Mount Hermon ridgeline overlooking the Damascus plain and the Golan Heights.

OPPOSING PLANS

JORDANIAN PLANS

On 3 June 1967, the new C-in-C of the Jordanian armed forces, General Abdul Munim Riadh, completed a tour of inspection of Jordanian troop dispositions in the West Bank dotted along the 630km (390-mile) armistice line with Israel. Most of the Jordanian units were spread wide and thin as a political gesture to assuage the Palestinians that their villages and farms were being protected against any Israeli incursion similar to Samu. Military logic dictated that the forces should be concentrated in key strategic areas to defend against a concerted offensive by the IDF. Unfortunately, Gen. Riadh did nothing to rectify the situation beyond ordering the deployment of some US-manufactured 'Long Tom' 155mm howitzers further forwards in order to increase their range against targets inside Israel. More fatefully, he altered the posture of the Jordanian Air Force from air defence of the ground forces to ground attack inside Israel. Air defence over Jordan was now to be provided by Egyptian, Syrian and Iraqi aircraft, since the Jordanians possessed just 22 subsonic Hawker Hunter jet fighters. On the same day, 3 June, Iraq joined the Egypt–Jordan mutual defence pact. Iraqi forces would now deploy to Jordan, together with Saudi and Syrian troops, as part of a concerted United Arab Command to prosecute the war against Israel. Further contingents from Libya, Morocco and Tunisia were flocking to the cause. Even the PLO was ready for war as its bombastic leader, Ahmad al-Shuqayri, declaimed after Friday prayers pledging that the PLO was 'prepared to take its place in advance positions on the Jordanian front so it can stand face to face with the Zionist gangs'. He further declared that the PLO now possessed ultra-modern weapons that he, as the leader of the PLO, would direct personally from the front. He concluded by saying: 'We shall destroy Israel and its inhabitants and as for the survivors, it there are any, the boats are ready to deport them!'

In reality, Jordan had few military options. Its forces were spread too thinly for any offensive operations against Israel proper despite ambitions to drive from Qalqilya to the Mediterranean Sea at Netanya and cut the county in two: Israel's strategic nightmare. The only coherent plan was for the capture of West Jerusalem under the codename Operation *Tariq* – after the renowned Arab general, Tariq ibn Ziyad, after whom Gibraltar is named. Operation *Tariq* entailed a four-pronged assault on Israeli positions to the north and south of the city including the Israeli enclave on Mount Scopus, Government House Ridge and from Latrun to cut the 'Jerusalem Corridor'. Operational orders were



Troops and tanks of the 16th Etzioni Jerusalem Infantry Brigade attack Government House in the initial action for the battle of Jerusalem to relieve the UNTSO troops trapped there by Jordanian forces.

issued for the offensive including written instructions for 'The Destruction of Israeli Settlements and Killing All Persons in Them'. The capture of West Jerusalem and its Jewish population of 197,000 would provide a strong bargaining hand against any Israeli incursions or conquests in the West Bank. Furthermore, as Chief of Operations Brigadier-General Atif al-Majali stated: 'He who controls Jerusalem, controls the West Bank.' With the 'Jerusalem Corridor' cut and West Jerusalem occupied, there would have been very little the IDF could have done to relieve the beleaguered Israelis in the Holy City. Inexplicably, Gen. Riadh vetoed Operation *Tariq*. Only King Hussein could overrule Riadh but he demurred. As to the joint Operation *Lion* between Egypt and Jordan to occupy the Negev Desert and the port of Eilat, as well as capturing the Israeli nuclear facility at Dimona, it remained just a series of ambitious arrows on staff officers' maps.

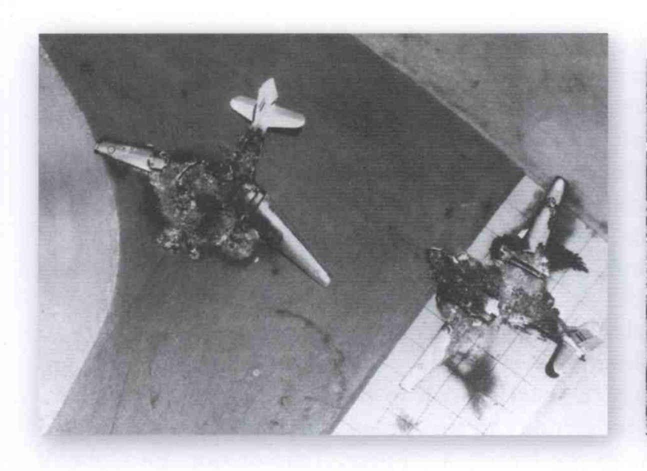
At the disposal of the United Arab Command were 900 modern combat aircraft, almost 5,000 battle tanks and over 500,000 troops, but instead of concerted and rational military planning the Arab leaders resorted to gruesome rhetoric. The Algerian Prime Minister declared: 'The freedom of the homeland will be completed by the destruction of the Zionist entity and the expulsion of the Americans and the British from the region.' The foreign minister of Yemen stated: 'We want war. War is the only way to settle the problem of Israel. The Arabs are ready.' The overall strategy was summed up by President Aref of Iraq: 'Our goal is clear – to wipe Israel off the map. We shall, Insha'Allah, meet in Tel Aviv and Haifa.' While such utterances caused crisis and consternation among the Israeli population, they did not impress the high command of the IDF. On the night before the war, IDF Chief of Staff Major-General Yitzhak Rabin recalled 'The IDF was wound up like a mighty spring. Over the weeks of waiting, they [the operational plans] had undergone repeated revision as the circumstances shifted on the southern front. We had gone through Operation *Fork* and Operation *Hoe* – what seemed like a whole farmyard of plans – on paper, on maps, with sticks in the sand. Now we would make our way through the final plan with tanks, half-tracks and trucks.'

ISRAELI PLANS

Israel's war aims were simple. As stated by Gen. Moshe Dayan, they were '… to destroy the Egyptian Army and to open the Straits of Tiran' although these were embellished in his Order of the Day for 5 June 1967 when hostilities began as 'Soldiers of the IDF, we have no objective of conquest. Our goal is to frustrate the attempt of the Arab armies to conquer our country and to break the ring of isolation and aggression surrounding us.' At this stage there were no plans to attack Syria or to conquer the West Bank, let alone Jerusalem. However, unlike the Arab armies, the IDF had several real contingency plans in place for such eventualities that had evolved over many years. Northern Command had three specific plans for the Golan Heights depending on the circumstances and objectives prevailing at the outbreak of war. Nevertheless, none would be implemented until Egypt was defeated and then only following overt provocation from Syria. Similarly, Central Command had formulated Operation *Whip* for possible operations to occupy the West Bank and the relief of Jerusalem. To Dayan this was a long-term objective as he too lamented the failure of the IDF to achieve its capture during the War of Independence of 1948. To this end he objected to the cabinet's decision of 4 June to warn King Hussein that the IDF would not attack unless Jordan opened hostilities as this would present the perfect opportunity but only once Egypt was eliminated from the field of battle in the Sinai. And that was dependent upon the success or failure of Operation *Moked* – the pre-emptive air attack to destroy the Egyptian air force on the ground.

As always in warfare, topography has a profound effect on tactics and the ridges that ran northwards from Jerusalem held the key to mastery of the Judaean Plateau. Not only did they dominate all the roads that led from Jericho in the east and from the narrow coastal plain in the west, but they were also able to cover with observed artillery fire the vital main Jerusalem–Tel Aviv road. Thus, the first step in any campaign to relieve the Holy City was the securing of these ridges, in particular those running north of the 'Jerusalem Corridor', which also included the area around Latrun. The broad plateau in this area allows armoured fighting vehicles to manoeuvre; however, the main problem for the Israelis was how to break through to this high ground from the lower, adjacent territory of Israel. There were three ridges to be addressed: the first being the Biddu–Radar Hill ridge to Maale Hahamisha at Abu Ghosh; the second was the ridge that ran off it near to the Radar Hill strongpoint then continued through Beit Sureik and on across the border and finally, the Nebi Samwil–Beit Iska ridge that ends in the north-west corner of the city of Jerusalem. These three ridges were the chosen routes for the Israeli armoured forces comprising Colonel Uri Ben Ari's 10th Harel Mechanized Brigade, in their advance towards the Jerusalem–Ramallah road, in order to outflank the enemy forces north of the city. Meanwhile, Colonel Moshe Yotvat's 4th Reserve Infantry Brigade was to capture Latrun and destroy the Jordanian forces at Upper Beth Horon, between Latrun and Ramallah. The prime objective was to secure the vulnerable Israeli enclave of Mount Scopus, less than a square mile in size, and thereby protect the rest of West Jerusalem. At this stage there were still no plans to capture all of the Holy City.

For the first few days of the war, Northern Command was ordered to adopt a defensive posture along the Syrian border and not to provoke the Syrians into outright action. Nevertheless, longstanding contingency plans were in place





LEFT
Israel's strategy in the war was based on a devastating pre-emptive strike against the Arab air forces in an operation codenamed *Moked* or *Focus*. On the first day of the war, the IAF struck at airbases in Egypt, Jordan, Iraq and Syria. The whole of the Jordanian Air Force of 28 aircraft was destroyed while Syria lost 53 and Iraq ten.

RIGHT
A column of vehicles bypasses a disabled AMX-13 Light Tank during the perilous ascent of the Golan escarpment. Of interest, this view shows the two externally mounted, six-round ammunition magazines that served the automatic loader of the 75mm main armament.

ranging from retaliatory raids through a comprehensive lodgement up to eight kilometres (five miles) deep to the conquest of the entire Golan Plateau. There was even a contingency plan designated Operation *Garzen* or *Hatchet* for a two-division offensive to attack and conquer the Syrian capital Damascus within 80 hours: a recurring nightmare for the Ba'ath regime. The plan for the capture of the Golan Plateau was codenamed Operation *Pincers* while the more limited offensive to gain the Golan Heights was known as Operation *Hammer*. This plan entailed the main effort being made on a six-kilometre (four-mile) front at the very top of the Israel–Syria border between the settlement of Dan and Kfar Szold. This was to be undertaken by Colonel Albert Mendler's 8th Armored Brigade, less two Sherman companies, up routes that had been extensively reconnoitred that were not too steep for the tanks but steep enough for the Syrian defences to be less extensive than elsewhere. Meanwhile, the 1st Golani Infantry Brigade, with two tank companies of the 8th, was to assault the heavily fortified positions at Tel Azzaziat and Tel Fakhr, then negotiate the steep climb up the slopes to Banias. Once these were captured, the tanks would exploit in a south-eastwards direction along the Golan escarpment through Qala and Wasit to Kuneitra, the regional capital.

Further south, the 37th Armored Brigade and 3rd Infantry Brigade were to mount subsidiary attacks to capture Rawiya and Jelabina and then clear the escarpment from north to south taking the strong Syrian positions facing the Bnot Ya'acov Bridge from the rear. Finally, in the far south to the east of the Sea of Galilee, a combined ground and heliborne assault by the 2nd Infantry Brigade and a battalion of the 55th Paratroop Brigade was to seize the escarpment above the Yarmouk Gorge at Fiq and advance to Butmiya and link up with the armoured forces moving southwards. The main thrust in the north was assigned to Brigadier-General Dan Laner who was the Chief of Staff to Brigadier-General Elazar within Northern Command. As was customary in the IDF, his forces of the 1st Golani Infantry Brigade together with the 8th and 45th armored brigades, were combined into a division-sized formation known as Ugda Laner. With their usual flexibility, there was much cross-fertilization between armour and infantry units, thus the two battalions of the 8th, one armoured and one mechanized, were organized into three separate combined-arms battlegroups. Yet there remained the significant problem of how to disguise the assembly of so many units in the Galilee Finger, as the low-lying plain is some 11km (seven miles) of flat terrain overlooked by the Golan Heights in every direction. Fortunately, many years before, the Israelis had planted numerous double

rows of trees and bushes beside the roads that criss-crossed the region. As if by coincidence, they now provided excellent cover for scores of tanks and hundreds of other vehicles as they formed up for the assault.

Intelligence of Syrian positions was good thanks to extensive aerial photographs and months of assiduous study of Syrian farming patterns that provided an accurate assessment of the layout of minefields or not. The Mossad agent, Eli Cohen, had provided further excellent intelligence about Syrian battle positions and plans. He had penetrated into the highest political circles in Syria before he was discovered and executed on 18 May 1965. An apocryphal story relates that Cohen persuaded the Syrian military to plant eucalyptus trees beside every artillery emplacement so that the gun crews could shelter from the searing sun in the shade of their branches. Since eucalyptus is not indigenous to the Golan, the trees readily revealed every gun emplacement to the Israeli Air Force. True or not, Eli Cohen's contribution to the Israeli victory on the Golan Heights was considerable.

SYRIAN PLANS

It is fair to say that the Syrian political and military establishment had no appetite for a general war with Israel. Nevertheless, the morale of the army was high and there was every confidence that the formidable defences of the Golan Plateau could absorb and defeat any attack as determined in the defensive plans known as Operation *Jihad* or *Holy War*. Captain Muhammad Ammar served in the stronghold of Tel Fakhr and had no qualms about any forthcoming war: 'We thought we were stronger, that we could cling to our lands and that the Golan was impenetrable. We were especially heartened by the unity between Syria, Egypt and Jordan.' Furthermore, a major offensive into Israel had been formulated, together with the assistance of Soviet advisers, under the codename Operation *Nasr* or *Victory*. It envisaged a two-pronged attack to the north and south of the Sea of Galilee by the 35th Group Brigade spearheaded by the 14th and 44th armoured brigades. The two prongs would then meet to the west of the Sea of Galilee after capturing Safed and Tiberias and then sweep on to the port of Haifa. Operation *Nasr* was scheduled to bring victory in six days. The general staff were even more optimistic as Colonel Mustafa Tlass, later to be Syrian defence minister during the October War of 1973, predicted: 'If hostilities break out, the UAR [Egypt] and Syria can destroy Israel in four days at most.' However, there was a flaw in the plan. The Bnot Ya'acov Bridge was in fact a World War II British Army prefabricated Bailey Bridge, with an internal width of 3.43m (11.3ft). This presents no problem for a Sherman tank at 2.62m (8.6ft) wide or even a Centurion that was designed to cross Bailey Bridges – just – with a width of 3.38m (11.1ft). Unfortunately, Syrian staff work was somewhat remiss as the principal main battle tank of the Syrian Army was the T-54/55 with a width of 3.57m (11.7ft).

OPPOSING COMMANDERS

JORDANIAN COMMANDERS

The command structure of the Jordanian Army comprised a GHQ in the capital of Amman under its C-in-C, **Field Marshal Habes Majali**, the hero of the battle of Latrun in 1948 when he was a colonel in the Arab Legion. His deputy was **Major-General Sharif Nasser Ben Jamil** with an executive Chief of Staff, **Lieutenant-General Amer Khammash**. The highly respected **Brigadier-General Atif al-Majali** acted as the Chief of Operations. The Western and Eastern Commands were respectively headed by **Major-General Muhammad Ahmed Salim** and **Brigadier-General Mashour Haditha al-Jazzi** with their HQs at Ramallah and Zarqa respectively. Western Command was divided into the following sectors of the Jordan Valley: Jenin, Nablus, Ramallah, Jerusalem and Hebron, while Eastern Command was divided into northern and southern



With the capture of the Western Wall, Gen. Moshe Dayan made a triumphal entry into the Old City of Jerusalem in company with the Chief of Staff of the IDF, Maj. Gen. Yitzhak Rabin (right) and Brig. Gen. Uzi Narkiss, GOC Central Command (left). Prime Minister Levi Eshkol was furious at this blatant photo opportunity as Dayan had just told him that is was still much too dangerous to visit the Kotel.

In his characteristic beret, an affectation since his days as Minister of Defense, Prime Minister Levi Eshkol visits Northern Command on the final day of the war, 10 June. In the centre of the photograph, Brig. Gen. David Elazar confers with Gen. Moshe Dayan while standing in a cap with his hands on his knees is Colonel Yisrael Lior, the military secretary to the prime minister.



sectors. All these commanders were beholden to King Hussein of Jordan. The vast majority of the officer corps were of Bedouin stock from the mainly desert East Bank that was the sovereign's power base. By 1967, there were almost 1.2 million Palestinians living in Jordan with approximately 700,000 in the West Bank. Their loyalty to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan was suspect. Accordingly, they were deprived of weapons and forbidden to raise a militia to defend themselves against Israeli incursions or even the depredations of fedayeen insurgents. There was, however, a small Palestinian militia force in East Jerusalem. Although some Palestinians became politicians and even served in the cabinet, there were very few in the armed forces and it was the latter that kept King Hussein in power. On 1 June 1967, **General Abdul Munim Riadh**, the Chief of Staff of the UAC, arrived in Annam to assume command of the Jordanian armed forces. With him was a staff including **Major-General Hosni Eed**, Air Force **Brigadier-General Mustafa Al-Hinnawi** the Head of Air Operations of the UAC, **Colonel Munir Shash**, **Lieutenant-General Hosni Mekki** and a signals contingent to maintain constant communications with GHQ in Cairo. Understandably, relations with the Jordanian high command were cordial at best and antagonistic at worst but inevitably it added yet another layer of complexity to a field force that was stretched much too thinly on the ground.

ISRAELI COMMANDERS

By comparison, the Israeli chain of command was much simpler. The overall strategy and prosecution of the war was directed by the Minister of Defense, **General Moshe Dayan**, through the Chief of Staff of the IDF, **Major-General Yitzhak Rabin**. He in turn directed the three different commands of the IDF with Southern Command facing Egypt, Central Command facing Jordan and Northern Command facing Jordanian Samaria, Syria and Lebanon. The GOC Central Command was **Brigadier-General Uzi Narkiss**. In 1948, both he and Yitzhak Rabin had served in the Harel Brigade of the Palmach in the battle for

Jerusalem. Narkiss had led the last counterattack through the Zion Gate into the Jewish Quarter of the Old City but, outnumbered and exhausted, his unit was expelled by the Jordanians and Jerusalem was lost. It was a failure that haunted Rabin and Narkiss thereafter with the latter still suffering '... from guilt that Jerusalem was divided, that no Jew remained in the Old City ... for one night I held the gate of the city in my hands but it was torn out of them.' Former Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion felt it equally deeply and called the loss of the Holy City 'a lamentation for generations'. Although Jerusalem had no strategic military value, its religious and historic significance to the Jews was immense: as it was to Christians and Muslims. To Rabin and Narkiss there was no greater prize but Dayan's orders were quite specific and the capture of Jerusalem did not figure in any of his plans – yet.

SYRIAN COMMANDERS

The Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party assumed power in Syria on 8 March 1963 under the dictatorship of General Hafiz Amin. The primary aim of the party over the coming years was to consolidate its power and dominate all aspects of Syrian society. As displacement for its inept governance, it raised the spectre of Israeli intervention to unify the Syrian people against a perceived outside threat, 'the expanding pus which disseminates poisons of hatred and animosity'. Yet unity within the Ba'ath Party proved elusive. On 23 February 1966 another military coup brought to power an even more extreme Ba'athist regime. Composed mostly of Alawites, a heterodox sect abhorred by the Sunni majority of Syrians, the new government was led by Chief of Staff **General Salah Jadid** and Air Force Commander **Hafez al-Assad**: the latter was to become President of Syria for over 30 years. Once again, foreign policy was based on confrontation with Israel and an uneasy ideological alliance with the Soviet Union.

Despite their best efforts, the standard of training within the Syrian armed forces remained mediocre at best. This was due largely to repeated purges of the officer corps to ensure the utmost loyalty to the regime rather than military expertise. During 1966 alone some 2,000 field officers were replaced by Ba'athist 'educators'. With no field experience at all, **Ibrahim Isma'il Khahya** was appointed as commander of the 8th Infantry Brigade overlooking the vital Bnot Ya'acov Bridge and thought to be one of the most likely avenues of an attack by the IDF. The chief of intelligence on the Golan Heights, Colonel Nash'at Habash was replaced by a lowly captain who happened to be the brother of a high-ranking Ba'ath official. Untainted by a foreign posting as military attaché in Beijing, **Colonel Ahmad Suweidani** was promoted to lieutenant general and chief of staff in one fell swoop to lead the Syrian armed forces just prior to the Six Day War.

OPPOSING FORCES

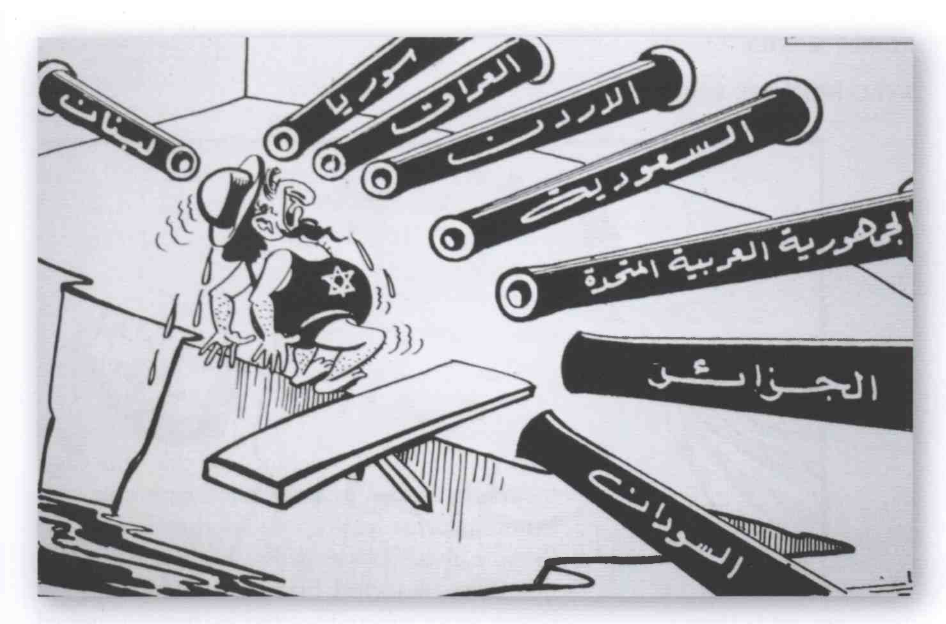
JORDANIAN FORCES

In the Second Arab-Israeli War of 1956, the battles between Israel and her Arab neighbours were confined to the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip. However, in 1967, there were three more different battle areas, including the Jordanian-controlled West Bank, the Holy City of Jerusalem itself and lastly the Syrian-held Golan Heights. The West Bank area was formally under the control of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and was known as the 'West Bank' because it was to the west of the Jordan River. It stretched from the area around Jenin in Samaria in the north to Hebron in Judea in the south. Within this Jordanian dominated area was the Israeli-held 'Jerusalem Corridor'. It linked the New City of Jerusalem with its mainly Jewish population of approximately 197,000 to Tel Aviv and the coastal areas of central Israel. This vitally important corridor was overlooked from the north by the outpost of Latrun, a fierce battleground in June 1948 during the First Arab-Israeli War.

In the anxious days prior to the war, there was every expectation of extensive civilian casualties and much civil defence works were undertaken such as these students filling sandbags at their school in Tel Aviv.



The strategy adopted by Israel for dealing with these three areas was to maintain a purely defensive posture since the bulk of the IDF was needed to defeat the Egyptian Army in the Sinai Peninsula on the basis that it is inadvisable to fight on more than one front at a time, particularly against numerically superior forces. It was hoped that King Hussein of Jordan would maintain his country's neutrality, despite the intense political pressure from the leaders of the rest of the Arab world. To this end, Israel covertly informed King Hussein that Jordan would not be attacked unless she opened hostilities against Israel. However, Syria was a different matter indeed, but would be addressed only once the offensive against Egypt was successfully completed. Nevertheless, both countries were highly influenced in their actions by the misinformation, not to say blatant lies, fed to them by Egypt at the outset of the conflict.



This reproduction is typical of hundreds of anti-Semitic cartoons that were published across the Arab world prior to the Six Day War, with Israel being driven into the Mediterranean Sea by the armed forces of eight Arab countries.

War with Jordan therefore came as a surprise to Israel, although it had become ever more likely once King Hussein entered into military alliances with both Egypt and Syria against his better judgement. However, he would have been in danger of being hailed as a traitor to the Arab cause and overthrown if he had not joined with them to stand fast against the hated 'Zionist entity'. Furthermore, King Hussein had agreed to the appointment of Egyptian General Abdul Munim Riadh as Commander-in-Chief of the Jordanian forces, together with the deployment of two Egyptian Commando battalions (the 33rd and 53rd) to Jordan. The 55,000-man Jordanian Army was divided into the Eastern and Western commands, with the division marked by the Jordan River. In June 1967, the bulk of the Jordanian forces was deployed in the West Bank in two main areas: in Samaria in the north, based in and around the towns of Jenin and Nablus and in the south in the area from Ramallah through Jerusalem down to Hebron. In both areas the Jordanian forward positions were deployed along the eastern edge of the coastal lowlands that bordered Israel at its narrowest point with the coastal towns within range of Jordanian artillery.

Two Jordanian brigades remained to the east of the Jordan River with the Hussein Ben Ali Infantry Brigade situated between Amman and Aqaba in the south while the Yarmouk Brigade was to the north of Amman, guarding the approaches to the northern Jordan Valley. In addition the Royal Guard Brigade was stationed in Amman to protect the political elite. There were seven infantry brigades deployed within or close to the West Bank with three of them, the 1st, 2nd and 25th, holding a perimeter around Jordanian Samaria. The 25th 'Khalid Ibn Walid' Infantry Brigade was deployed around Jenin, with two battalions on the border and the third in reserve near Kabatiya. It was reinforced by a squadron of M47 Patton tanks together with one battery of 25-pdr guns and one battery of 155mm howitzers. To the south was the 1st 'Princess Alia' Infantry Brigade spread around Qalqilya and Tulkarem threatening Israel at its very narrowest point. The brigade was supported by two batteries of 25-pdr guns and two of 155mm howitzers. Opposite Tel Aviv was the 2nd 'Hashimi' Infantry Brigade situated forward of Ramallah with one of its battalions in the Latrun enclave dominating



A Centurion Mark 5 armed with a 20-pdr gun provides supporting fire in the Ayalon Valley suggesting that it is attached to the 10th Harel Mechanized Brigade during the advance along the 'Jerusalem Corridor' on 5 June.

the 'Jerusalem Corridor'. The brigade was supported by several batteries of field artillery to engage Israeli airbases on the coastal plain as well as targets in the 'Jerusalem Corridor'.

To the south in Judaea was the 29th 'Hittin' Infantry Brigade stationed in the Hebron area with one battalion south of the 'Jerusalem Corridor', one at Mount Zion and the other south of Mount Hebron. The brigade was reinforced by a field artillery regiment of 25-pdr guns and two squadrons of Centurion tanks. There were two brigades in and around Jerusalem, with the 3rd 'Talal' Infantry Brigade responsible for the defence of the Old City. It was reinforced by a battalion from the 27th Infantry Brigade. Known as the 'Imam Ali' Brigade, the 27th was deployed around Jericho, guarding two vital bridges over the Jordan River, from where it acted as second line of defence and as potential reinforcements for the garrison in Jerusalem. The final formation was the 6th 'Qadisiya' Infantry Brigade situated in the northern Jordan Valley north of the Damiya Bridge. It was reinforced by a squadron of M47 tanks and a field artillery regiment of 25-pdr guns. An armoured reserve, comprising one tank battalion, was located to the east of Jerusalem, but the main Jordanian armoured strike force, the 40th and 60th armoured brigades of the Army Reserve, was based in the Jordan Valley, east of the Judaean hills with the 40th near the Damiya Bridge and the 60th near Jericho. The Egyptian 33rd and 53rd commando battalions were also committed to the front, notionally as a strike force to attack IDF airbases. The main logistic base for the Jordanian Army was located to the east of the Jordan River, with supply dumps on the West Bank. Combat support services were attached to the brigades and were responsible for ensuring their supplies. Additionally, the Jordanians were expecting the deployment of the Iraqi 3rd Armoured Division with 150 tanks, a Saudi Arabian brigade, a Syrian brigade and two squadrons of Iraqi aircraft as part of the Unified Arab Command (UAC). In the event, these forces failed to materialize, although the Iraqi formation eventually deployed onto Jordanian soil and stayed long after the ceasefire causing much consternation to the Jordanian Government.

ISRAELI FORCES

Facing the Jordanian army was the IDF's Central Command under the command of Brigadier-General Uzi Narkiss, a veteran of the 1948 War of Independence when Israel failed to capture the Old City of Jerusalem. It remained his burning ambition to rectify this failure but he was under strict orders from Minister of Defense Moshe Dayan not to provoke the Jordanians in any shape or form. Any notion of offensive operations was just not feasible since the bulk of Central Command's ammunition had been transferred to Southern Command. Indeed, Dayan had informed Narkiss on 31 May: 'Don't bother the General Staff with requests for reinforcements. Grit your teeth and ask for nothing.' Brigadier-General Narkiss was dismayed and envious of his





LEFT
An AML-90 Panhard armoured car of the 41st Reconnaissance Company leaves the village of Beit Hanina as it heads up the road towards Ramallah on 7 June.

RIGHT
Israeli paratroopers advance warily through the confined streets of Jerusalem that were ideally suited for defence, but superior IDF training and morale prevailed in the end.

two counterparts in Southern and Northern commands. He was convinced that Major-General Yeshayahu Gavish was about to 'paddle his feet in the Suez Canal' and Brigadier-General David Elazar 'would plant his feet on the Golan Heights' while Central Command remained inactive. Nevertheless, Narkiss had mobilized his formations in a suitably 'defensive posture'. The largest of these was the eight-battalion 16th Etzioni Jerusalem Brigade commanded by Colonel Eliezer Amitai deployed inside the 'Jerusalem Corridor' and the New City of Jerusalem. To the west of the 'Jerusalem Corridor' was the 4th Reserve Infantry Brigade, commanded by Colonel Moshe Yotvat, while the 10th Harel Mechanized Brigade, commanded by Colonel Uri Ben Ari, remained in GHQ Reserve covering Tel Aviv and the airbases at Lod and Tel Nof. Further north near Netanya was the 5th Reserve Infantry Brigade. Three further brigades were located in the Jezreel Valley, north of Samaria, comprising the 45th Armored Brigade, the 37th Armored Brigade and the 9th Reserve Infantry Brigade grouped into a divisional sized unit – Ugda Peled. These latter formations were the responsibility of Northern Command under Brig. Gen. David 'Dado' Elazar.

All Israeli forces were ordered to maintain their defensive postures, even if provoked by enemy fire, provided this did not escalate to a degree that could be interpreted as all-out war. As indicated above, the Israeli government went so far as to send a note to King Hussein, via the UN Treaty Supervision Organization (UNTSO) in Jerusalem, saying that the IDF would not attack unless the Jordanians did so first. To reinforce the message, it was also relayed to the Jordanians via the US State Department and the British Foreign Office. Adhering strictly to Moshe Dayan's orders not to provoke the Jordanians, Col. Amitai recalled 'Tanks couldn't start up, recoilless rifles couldn't move for fear of provoking the Jordanians. We wanted them to be quiet.' Even sentries' rifles were unloaded of ammunition in case an accidental discharge should cause alarm.

SYRIAN FORCES

Prior to June 1967, the Syrian border with Israel was some 72km (45 miles) long. It ran from Mount Hermon in the north to the Yarmouk Valley in the south that also formed the border with Jordan. The entire length runs along an escarpment known as the Golan Heights that tower to some 900m above and immediately to the east of the Jordan River and Sea of Galilee. The Golan





LEFT
An AMX-13 Light Tank is replenished with ammunition and prepared for action prior to combat on the Golan Plateau on the final day of the war, 10 June.

RIGHT
An Israeli Dodge Power Wagon passes a knocked-out T-54. There were few tank-versus-tank engagements during the Syrian campaign, with the great majority of IDF tank casualties being due to anti-tank guns and mines. The Syrian Army lost 73 T-54, T-34/85 and German PzKpfw IV tanks as well as seven SU-100 self-propelled guns and a handful of old StuG III assault guns of World War II vintage.

Plateau extends some 30km (19 miles) eastwards to the Damascus Plain with the capital of Damascus just 80km (50 miles) from the border. To the north, the terrain is a boulder-strewn landscape of basalt rocks and lava flows with volcanic cones or hills, known as 'tels'. Further southwards, the countryside is rolling and dotted by agricultural settlements with a predominately Druze population. There are just three roads of any note crossing the Golan Plateau. The main route that has existed since Biblical times runs from Damascus via Kuneitra, the capital of the Golan region, via the Bnot Ya'acov (Daughters of Jacob) Bridge over the Jordan River and on to the port of Haifa on the Mediterranean Sea. The Golan Heights completely dominate the flat Huleh Plain and the Galilee Finger below, where the Israelis had established many kibbutzim. For years, these lay at the mercy of the Syrian Army's guns.

Since the 1948 war, the Golan Plateau had been transformed into a veritable fortress that was permanently manned by the Syrian army. Built into the basalt rock were bunkers and pillboxes in a network of interlocking positions arranged in several layers and using the topographical features to the maximum effect in order to cover all possible approaches. These were linked by revetted fire trenches and covered communication trenches. Each fortified locality was surrounded by thick belts of barbed wire and mines. There were three fortified lines following standard Soviet practice. Interspersed among the fortifications were more than 500 artillery pieces capable of firing over ten tons of shells per minute into Israel, not including the batteries of Katyusha free-flight rockets that served as devastating area weapons. Beside the artillery and fortifications, they were some 750 tanks and self-propelled guns, mostly of Soviet manufacture, with many of those in the front lines dug in with only their guns and turrets showing above ground level.

The field fortifications were held by eight brigades of the Syrian army with five infantry brigades, each with an attached tank battalion of T-34/85s and SU-100 self-propelled guns, holding the first two lines and three armoured and mechanized brigades along and behind the third line. In addition there were four reserve infantry brigades deployed between Damascus and Kuneitra, as well as seven battalions of the National Guard militia that were deployed to bolster the defensive lines. These forces were divided into 'Group Brigades' in Syrian terminology although this was an administrative convenience rather than a tactical deployment. North of the Kuneitra–Bnot Ya'acov Bridge was the 12th Group Brigade under the command of Colonel Amed Amir. It comprised the 11th Infantry Brigade and the 132nd Reserve Infantry Brigade with 80th Reserve Infantry Brigade and 44th Armoured Brigade in the second



A pair of M7 Priest 105mm self-propelled guns trundles across the Golan Plateau in support of the rapid advance on the last day of the war.

echelon. To the south of the road was the 35th Group Brigade under the command of Brigadier-General Said Tayan. It comprised the 8th and 19th Infantry Brigades with the 32nd Infantry Brigade and the 17th Mechanized Infantry Brigade in the second echelon. In general reserve was the 42nd Group Brigade under the command of Brigadier-General Abdul Razzak Dardari. It comprised the 14th Armoured Brigade, the 25th Infantry Brigade and the 50th and 60th Reserve Infantry Brigades. In total, there were some 70,000 Syrian troops under the overall command of the recently promoted Syrian Chief of Staff, Lieutenant-General Ahmad Suweidani.

ORDERS OF BATTLE

JORDANIAN ARMY

C-in-C Field Marshal Habes Majali (General Abdul Munim Riadh of Egypt in command of all Jordanian Forces)

WESTERN COMMAND

1st 'Princess Alia' Infantry Brigade
2nd 'Hashimi' Infantry Brigade
3rd 'Talal' Infantry Brigade
6th 'Qadisiya' Infantry Brigade
25th 'Khalid Ibn Walid' Infantry Brigade
27th 'Imam Ali' Infantry Brigade
29th 'Hittin' Infantry Brigade
40th Armoured Brigade
60th Armoured Brigade

EASTERN COMMAND

Hussein Ali Infantry Brigade
Yarmouk Infantry Brigade
Royal Guard Brigade

ISRAELI DEFENSE FORCES

CENTRAL COMMAND

GOC Brig. Gen. Uzi Narkiss

4th Reserve Infantry Brigade
5th Reserve Infantry Brigade
16th Etzioni Jerusalem Infantry Brigade

Ugda Peled (from Northern Command)
9th Reserve Infantry Brigade (Central Command)
37th Armored Brigade
45th Armored Brigade

Attached:
10th Harel Mechanized Brigade (from GHQ Reserve)
55th Paratroop Brigade (from Southern Command)

NORTHERN COMMAND

GOC Brig. Gen. David Elazar

1st Golani Infantry Brigade
2nd Infantry Brigade
3rd Infantry Brigade
37th Armored Brigade
45th Armored Brigade

Reinforcements:
8th Armored Brigade
55th Paratroop Brigade

SYRIAN ARMY

GOC Maj. Gen. Ahmed Souedani

12TH GROUP BRIGADE

11th Infantry Brigade
132nd Reserve Infantry Brigade
80th Reserve Infantry Brigade
44th Armoured Brigade

35TH GROUP BRIGADE

8th Infantry Brigade
19th Infantry Brigade
32nd Infantry Brigade
17th Mechanized Infantry Brigade

42ND GROUP BRIGADE

25th Infantry Brigade
50th Reserve Infantry Brigade
60th Reserve Infantry Brigade
14th Armoured Brigade

FIGHTING FOR THE HOLY PLACES

THE PLANS UNFOLD

From the moment the IAF took to the skies just after 0700hrs on 5 June 1967, its aircraft were tracked by the modern British-manufactured radar station on a hilltop at Ajlun in Jordan, some 80km (50 miles) north of Amman and some 1,210m (3,970ft) above sea level. Despite Israeli deception measures, it was impossible to disguise the scale of the operation as the aircraft flew out to sea and then dropped to wave-top level and below radar detection. The information was immediately relayed to GHQ in Cairo, but the day before the Egyptians had changed the encryption codes without informing the Jordanians. The vital intelligence was thus now unreadable and the warning went unheeded. The destruction of the Egyptian Air Force ensued with brutal efficiency. At 0850hrs, King Hussein was informed of the Israeli offensive against Egypt. Almost immediately, the radar facility at Ajlun reported that hundreds of aircraft were flying from the direction of the Sinai. In a call to GHQ in Cairo, Hussein was informed that the IAF had suffered crippling losses and the Egyptian Air Force was mounting a major counterattack. Encouraged by this news of the impending air attack on Israel,



Jordanian positions in the Old City of Jerusalem come under Israeli artillery fire and air strikes.



Antiquated M1 Shermans of the 29th Tank Battalion attached to the 16th Etzioni Jerusalem Infantry Brigade provide supporting fire during the battle for Mount Scopus.

Hussein ordered his forces to begin offensive operations too. Needless to say, the approaching aircraft from the south was the IAF returning from the initial attacks of Operation *Moked*.

By 0900hrs, King Hussein was in his command HQ where Gen. Riadh was issuing his first orders as commander of the Jordanian armed forces. At 0930hrs, King Hussein gave a broadcast on Radio Amman informing his people that Jordan had been attacked and that 'the hour of revenge has come.' At 0945hrs, Jordanian artillery opened fire on targets in West Jerusalem. At first the IDF did not respond as they had anticipated some shelling in the interests of Arab solidarity, 'a salutatory salvo to fulfil its obligations to inter-Arab unity' in the dismissive words of Brig. Gen. Uzi Narkiss. But soon after 1000hrs, 155mm shells landed on the strategically vital Ramat David airbase in the Jezreel Valley. It was this shelling, together with some in the outskirts of Tel Aviv, that finally tipped the scales for a concerted Israeli response. Once King Hussein had committed Jordan fully to the Arab cause, then war became inevitable. Brigadier-General Narkiss was ordered to undertake Operation *Sho't* (*Whip*) in the Jerusalem and Western Samaria areas with the allocation of the two additional brigades from GHQ reserve, whilst responsibility for operations in northern Samaria passed from his command to Brig. Gen. Elazar's Northern Command.

At 1100hrs, the Jordanians began to bombard Israeli positions along the border while the long-range 155mm howitzers continued to pound important targets inside Israel. Air attacks against Israel followed while in Jerusalem, elements of the 29th 'Hittin' Infantry Brigade occupied the UNTSO headquarters in Government House, a supposed demilitarized zone that had formerly been the official residence of the British High Commissioner of Palestine. Brigadier-General Narkiss ordered his artillery to reply to the Jordanian action and part of Col. Eliezer Amitai's 16th Etzioni Jerusalem Infantry Brigade, was sent to counter the situation at Government House. Driving at speed in their half-tracks, they smashed through the improvised Jordanian roadblocks and pillboxes at the entrance to the UN post. Here they were caught by heavy artillery fire but, despite the devastating barrage, they rescued the UN forces and restored the UN headquarters. The 16th Etzioni Jerusalem Infantry Brigade then continued their assault and by nightfall had

captured Sur Bahir, a village that was located astride the main Jerusalem–Hebron road, thus preventing Jordanian access there, other than via mountain tracks and poor roads. This effectively prevented the Jordanians from using this area of the Hebron Hills as a forming-up area for any Jordanian assaults in the Beersheba direction that in theory might have linked up with the Egyptian forces advancing from the Negev as part of Operation *Lion*. Intriguingly, the leader of the PLO, Ahmad al-Shuqayri, whose strident calls for the destruction of Israel had been broadcast just days before, jumped in a car and fled to Damascus as soon as the first guns fired in anger.

HAREL IN THE HILLS

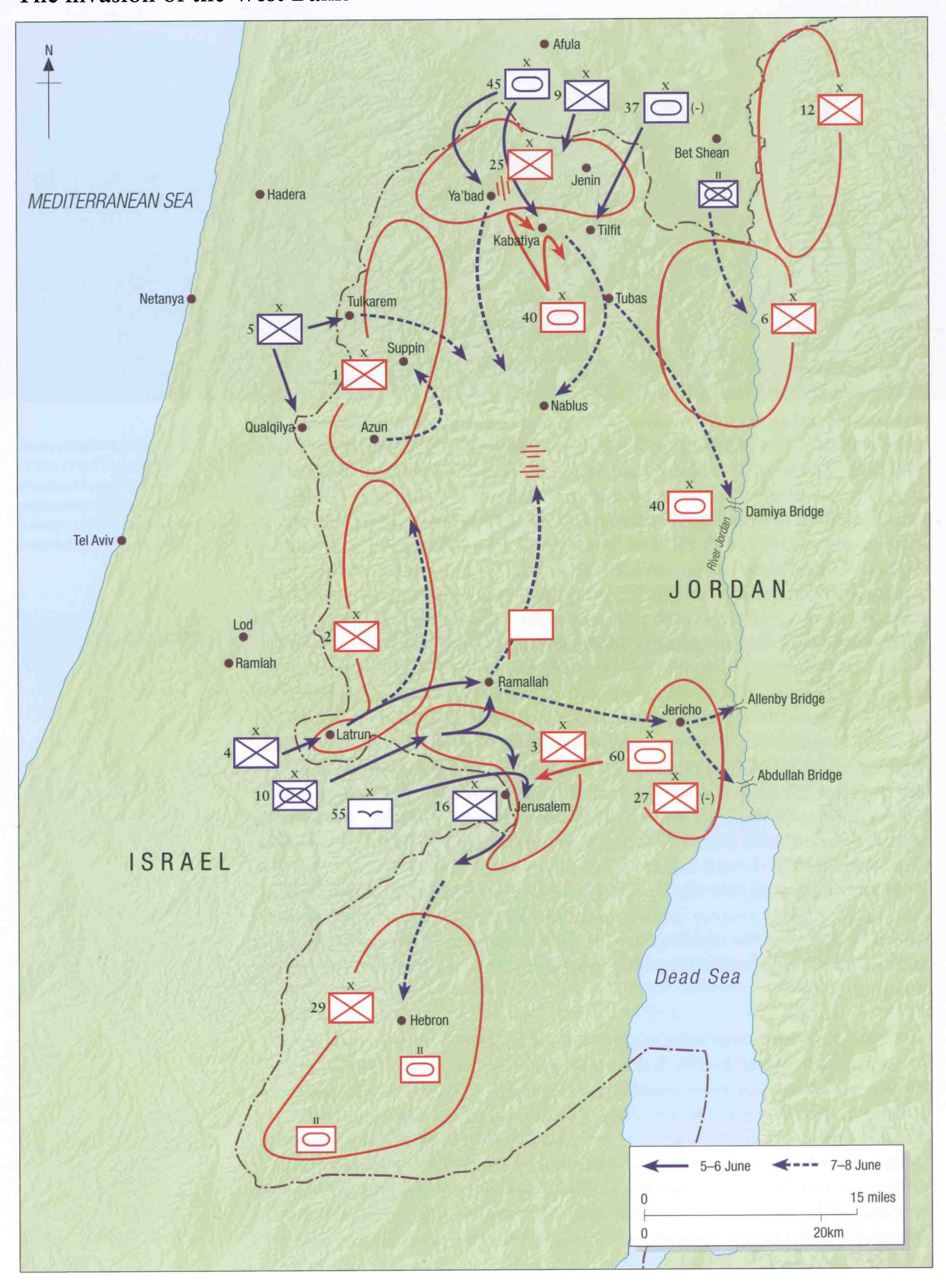
As part of the general offensive, Central Command initiated the isolation of Jerusalem from the bulk of the Jordanian forces to the north with the 10th Harel Mechanized Brigade under Col. Uri Ben Ari moving up the 'Jerusalem Corridor' to break through the Jordanian positions in the area of Maale Hahamisha and to seize the mountain ridge and road that connected Jerusalem and Ramallah. This area was the key to controlling Jerusalem and the Judaean Hills, because it overlooked the road to Jericho and controlled all approaches to the city except from the south but that was soon to be cut by the 16th Etzioni Jerusalem Infantry Brigade at Sur Bahir. Colonel Ben Ari was no stranger to this area, having fought over it in 1948, as a company commander in the Palmach Brigade. At that time, the important 'Radar Hill' had been taken by the Arab Legion after fierce hand-to-hand fighting during which Ben Ari had led his company in no fewer than five counterattacks, all of which had failed. The dominant feature had remained in Jordanian hands ever since.

This time the fighting would be different. Ben Ari's troops advanced up the main road from the coast, then, without pausing, turned north along three parallel axes and stormed the enemy positions, the tanks firing on the Arab bunkers at point-blank range, whilst supported by infantry and combat engineers. The assault began during the afternoon of 5 June and by the next day the strategic ridgeline was in Israeli hands. On the following morning Ben Ari's brigade was well established, overlooking Jerusalem and now in control of a vital area where the roads led to Jericho in the east, Latrun in the west, Ramallah in the north and to Jerusalem in the south.

Before the battle, Col. Ben Ari had been a very disappointed man, having been held in GHQ reserve whilst yearning to join the already raging tank battles in Sinai – all he could do was to follow their progress by listening to sporadic radio reports. He recalls the momentous moments when everything changed:

> We were all sorry about being in the Central Command ... The war we were told started at 0800 and by 1030 we were still sitting around. We sat like pregnant women, we knew something was going to be born but didn't know what ... I was very much fed up with my situation around noon, when my old friend from our joint Palmach days in 1948, General Uzi Narkiss, called me and ordered my brigade to move out immediately and isolate Jerusalem from the bulk of the Jordanian Army to its north. This was the dream job, just what I was waiting for! I did not even have to look at the map. Almost twenty years younger, as a company commander in this same Harel Brigade, then part of the elite Palmach infantry, I fought right there, with almost the same orders to

The invasion of the West Bank





M3 half-tracks of the 10th Harel Mechanized Brigade approach the village of Nebi Samwil, the burial place of the Old Testament prophet Samuel, to the north-west of Jerusalem.

> save Jerusalem from the Jordanians, then under King Hussein's grandfather, Abdullah. Gathering my command group and battalion commanders, I quickly ordered them to move up into the Jerusalem Corridor, break through the Jordanian lines in the area of Abu Gosh, seize the mountain ridge on the watershed line, between North Jerusalem and Ramallah. I knew that by controlling this strategic area, my brigade would hold the key to any Jordanian movement in the Jordan valley, which I guessed would be the axis of advance of their crack 60th Armoured Brigade, news of which was even now coming in over the intelligence network.

Ben Ari's 10th Harel Mechanized Brigade was made up of three reserve battalions, including the enlarged 95th Tank Battalion commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Zvika Dahav who had fought under Ben Ari in Sinai in 1956 while attached to Colonel Ariel Sharon's paratroop brigade. The battalion comprised five tank companies rather than the standard three, with four of M50 Shermans and one of Centurion Mark 5s armed with the older 20-pdr gun. Dahav was a professional armoured officer in whom Ben Ari had every confidence. Accordingly, he was given the most difficult job, that of manoeuvring his tanks over the nearly impassable mountain ridges and capturing Tel el Ful (Bean Hill), a key position overlooking Jerusalem. With the tanks were two mechanized infantry battalions, the 104th, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Ben David, a farmer, and the 106th under Lieutenant-Colonel Aaron Gal, a regular officer. Both battalions had three companies each. The brigade was also allocated the 163rd Infantry Battalion from the 16th Etzioni Jerusalem Infantry Brigade for the assault on Radar Hill, originally an RAF radar station to guard against Rommel's Luftwaffe planes but subsequently used to detect clandestine boats approaching Israel with illegal Jewish immigrants. The 10th was divided up into four battlegroups, each with components of armour, infantry and combat engineers, although the latter had little equipment since much of it had been sent to Southern Command in the Sinai. Facing them was the 2nd 'Hashimi' Infantry Brigade in well-prepared positions with numerous concrete bunkers covering the limited number of approach routes.

On the western flank, the 104th Mechanized Infantry Battalion with three dismounted companies supported by a company of Shermans, with the 163rd held in reserve, moved uphill directly from line of march to assault Radar Hill with the attack starting at 1700hrs to utilize the last period of daylight while the engineers cleared mines and the infantry and tanks were able to support each other more easily. Similarly, artillery fire could be readily adjusted prior to the actual infantry assault on the Jordanian line that was wired and mined deeply with an anti-tank ditch covering all approaches. Everything went well at first but as darkness fell the problems began. The lack of mine-clearing equipment slowed the advance and the infantry fell victim to mines. One tank moved ahead to explode the anti-personnel mines under its tracks, narrowly missing an anti-tank mine that blew off the suspension of the battalion commander's half-track following in its wake. The right-hand company stalled once it reached the belt of barbed wire because its wire-cutters had been left behind while most of the Bangalore torpedoes for breaching wire obstacles had been assigned to Southern Command. Nevertheless, the assault went in and the forward positions were cleared by 2000hrs after the Jordanians withdrew.

The task of clearing the depth positions was given to the 163rd Infantry Battalion. After making a circuitous approach from the west, the battalion struck the Jordanian positions from the flank with the combat engineers demolishing the fortified bunkers with shaped charges. The positions were cleared with only one Israeli casualty. The Jordanians attempted a counter-attack but it was quickly repulsed. The anti-tank ditch that surrounded the whole position thwarted any rapid exploitation towards the village of Biddu further along the ridgeline. It took several hours to fill the obstacle and allow the tanks to advance on Biddu, which was occupied by the Jordanians. Aided by the searchlights mounted on the M50 Shermans to illuminate targets, the dismounted infantry assaulted the village and by 0230hrs it was secured together with a part of the tarmac road running along the ridgeline.

On the central axis, the 106th Mechanized Infantry Battalion under Lt. Col. Aaron Gal with a Sherman tank company in the van attacked the strong Jordanian position at Esh Sheik Abd-el-Aziz under cover of artillery and air strikes. Using a Sherman as his command post, Gal was riding in the lead tank in the best traditions of the IDF when it struck a mine. He immediately transferred to another tank and ordered the following mechanized infantry to dismount. They and supporting combat engineers now took the lead but, as most of their mine-clearing equipment had been sent to the Sinai, the engineers were reduced to using Uzi cleaning rods to probe for mines. Despite their best efforts, casualties began to mount. According to Col. Ben Ari the mines '... were both old and new and totally unpredictable. We didn't have equipment for clearing them ... dozens of legs were lost.' While Lt. Col. Gal recalled, 'With no other choice the infantry had to attack without tank cover under a heavy Jordanian bombardment, leaping from stone to stone to avoid the mines. The battle was brutal with knives and bayonets.' By midnight the objectives had been taken after savage hand-to-hand combat, although many Jordanian officers had abandoned their men. After the battle, the Israelis found nobody with the rank higher than sergeant among the Jordanian dead. Israeli casualties were 15 killed, 60 wounded and seven Shermans knocked out.

On the eastern flank, the 95th Tank Battalion had the most difficult route to negotiate since it was little more than a goat track. With intelligence reports indicating the presence of the Jordanian 60th Armoured Brigade



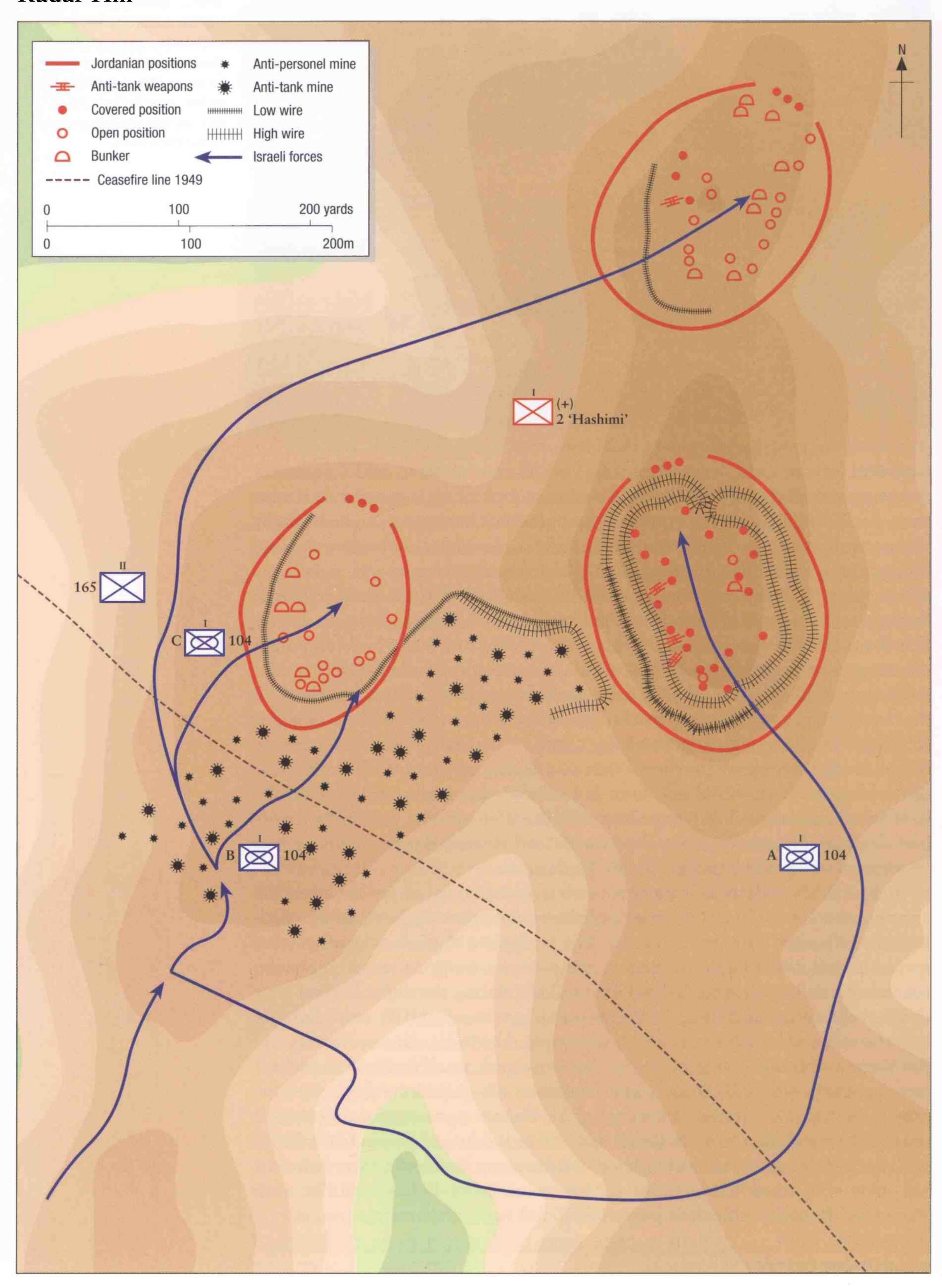
With a captured Jordanian vehicle number plate, an M3 half-track of the 10th Harel Mechanized Brigade prepares to move off towards Ramallah to link up with Ugda Peled to complete the occupation of the West Bank.

between Jericho and Jerusalem, Lt. Col. Dahar ordered the Centurion company to lead the advance as the Centurions had a higher ground clearance than the Shermans over the boulder-strewn track. Lacking any form of night vision equipment, the tanks were soon in trouble with shed tracks causing long delays while the Jordanian artillery bombardment was a serious disincentive to repair the damage. By 1830hrs all 12 Centurions were stuck fast on rocks or immobilized by shed tracks. It was now the turn of the Shermans to lead the advance. Despite the threat of mines, tank crewmen dismounted and guided the drivers around the boulders and obstacles up the steep slope, aided by the illumination provided by Jordanian flares fired by the defenders to detect the approaching tank column as the Shermans' engines screamed in protest during the long climb. Eventually, they reached the ridgeline and occupied the first objective of the tarmac road to the east of Nebi Samwil at 0200hrs[2]. One hour later, the armoured cars of the 41st Reconnaissance Group joined up with the 95th after its French Panhards had negotiated a track further westwards and cleared the positions at Beit Iska that had been abandoned by the Jordanians.

It had been a desperate gamble with every chance of failure over the appalling terrain. Only six Shermans clambered onto the ridgeline together with half a mechanized infantry company. The stragglers of the battlegroup were spread along the mountain tracks, their crews hard at work replacing roadwheels and track links, lost on the boulders during the night. As one tank commander, more used to operating in the desert, recalled, 'We were fighting two enemies and I don't know which was worse, the Jordanians or the terrain.' But there was no time to wait and as day broke this small force of Shermans, armoured cars and half-tracks, some 70 men in all, gained the final objective astride the Jerusalem to Ramallah road at Tel Zahara just north of the planned spot at Tel el Ful. Ben David's 104th was still at Biddu and Aaron Gal's 106th was moving through Nebi Samwil and still far away. Suddenly, from behind a hill, two squadrons (companies) of Jordanian M48 Pattons of the 60th Armoured Brigade, with their powerful 90mm main armament, opened fire.

2. It is of interest to note that it is possible to see Jerusalem from Nebi Samwil and it was the closest that Richard the Lionheart got to the Holy City during the Third Crusade in 1192.

Radar Hill


Jordanian positions
Anti-tank weapons
Covered position
Open position
Bunker
Ceasefire line 1949
Anti-personel mine
Anti-tank mine
Low wire
High wire
Israeli forces
0
100
200 yards
0
100
200m
N
(+)
2 'Hashimi'
165
C
104
B
104
A
104

One Sherman was immediately hit, but the other tank commanders reacted quickly. Realizing that their 75mm main armament was no match for the frontal armour of the Pattons, the tank commanders manoeuvred their lighter Shermans around the stationary Pattons to fire at their thinner flanks. Inadvertently, the Jordanian tanks were still fitted with supplementary fuel drums over the rear engine decks; these were intended to be used during an approach march and discarded prior to battle. The Israeli tank fire proved lethal against the unprotected fuel drums and six Pattons quickly burst into flames. The remainder retreated towards Jericho with 11 being abandoned by their crews.

At this point Col. Ben Ari arrived in a Sioux helicopter purloined from Southern Command to give much enhanced mobility in the hilly terrain. He was facing a critical situation. Although he had tanks and infantry in half-tracks on the Ramallah road, his force was still much too small to contain any serious enemy assault. Just then, as if to reinforce the point, he received a radio message telling him that the Jordanian 60th Armoured Brigade was even then advancing upwards towards his small force through the morning mist. However, the noise of tank tracks seemed to be coming from the wrong direction. In fact, it was the Centurion company that had crawled up the hill from the west. They immediately took up positions facing the anticipated attack by the Jordanian Pattons but it never materialized – it turned out that they had been diverted north to counter Ugda Peled advancing through the Dothan Valley. By 0930hrs much of the 10th Harel Mechanized Brigade was consolidated at Tel el Ful astride the Jerusalem to Ramallah road. It was a famous victory against deeply entrenched positions that the Jordanians had had almost 20 years to prepare. They fell in less than a day.

Even so, the situation remained extremely fluid, as frantic messages now came over the radio that Col. Motta Gur's 55th Paratroop Brigade was still fighting a savage battle on Ammunition Hill in the heart of Jerusalem. Colonel Ben Ari was ordered to capture two strategically placed hills called Givat Hamivtar and French Hill that dominated north Jerusalem and ease the pressure on the paratroopers. These two hills were pitted with heavy concrete bunker positions, barely visible from the road. Intelligence estimated that men of the 3rd Talal Infantry Brigade defended each stronghold with a reinforced company, supported by well dug-in anti-tank guns and mortars. Colonel Ben Ari recalls the battle that ensued:

> I knew the Jordanian fighters to be one of the toughest breed that I had met in battle, so I had no illusions about what lay ahead on those two hills. I could trust my old friend and comrade who was commanding the 106th Mechanized Infantry Battalion, Aaron Gal, who had fought with me in 1948 and was one of the toughest infantry commanders I knew. Two of his company commanders were also veterans – Captains Reichman and Bruchi. So I gave the 106th the top assignment – taking the commanding hill. After locating two companies of my tanks in hull-down positions and requesting heavy mortar support, I ordered the two infantry battalions forward and stormed the hills. The 104th took the lower hill with surprising ease, then set up supporting fire, to help Gal's men onto the outer defences of the second hill. But this time the Jordanians were waiting for them and engaged the 106th with everything they had. Their commander, Major Abu Rashid had his men under tight control, knowing that they were fighting for their lives. Behind him to the south, Israeli paratroops were making good headway and now my armour was about to close in – this Jordanian position held the key to East Jerusalem.

The Jordanians fought well and it required two costly assaults to dislodge them. Colonel Ben Ari's brigade now held the keys to both north Jerusalem and Ramallah. The threat of Jordanian armour from Jericho was much diminished, with the IAF pummelling the 60th Armoured Brigade severely all morning. The battle for the Holy City, however, was far from over. It had now shifted southwards into the dense environment of urban warfare.

Meanwhile, Col. Moshe Yotvat's 4th Reserve Infantry Brigade had attacked the former British police station at Latrun where Yotvat had fought in his youth during Israel's costliest defeat of the War of Independence in 1948. Scores of Israelis died in this battle including some of Yotvat's friends, although he was able to drag a badly injured comrade from the battlefield – Ariel Sharon, later to be Prime Minister of Israel. Remembering the direction of the assaults in 1948, Yotvat decided to attack from the opposite way. The assault began at 0300hrs on 6 June under a heavy artillery bombardment while large searchlights bathed the dominating building with an eerie glow as the shells crashed down on the Jordanian defenders of the 2nd 'Hashimi' Infantry Brigade. The latter soon fled leaving half-eaten meals. The impregnable fortress of 1948 fell within one hour. For Col. Yotvat it was a famous victory and, later that day, his brigade advanced through the Beth Horon Pass to link up with the 10th Harel Mechanized Brigade at Tel el Ful. This allowed the 10th Harel Mechanized Brigade to then exploit northwards towards Ramallah.

THE BATTLE FOR SAMARIA

Facing the northern end of the West Bank was Brig. Gen. Elad Peled's *ugda* comprising the 37th and 45th armored brigades with an infantry formation of reservists, the 9th Reserve Infantry Brigade. Opposite them were four Jordanian brigades, three infantry and one armoured in reserve, together with four independent battalions, two of which were armoured. The vitally important town of Jenin was held by the Jordanian 25th 'Khalid Ibn Walid' Infantry Brigade, commanded by Brigadier-General Mohammed Khalid, reinforced by a tank battalion with 44 M47 Pattons. The 1st Infantry Brigade was stationed around Nablus, while the 2nd Infantry Brigade was responsible for Latrun and the northern part of the Jerusalem Corridor. The main Jordanian reserve was 40th Armoured Brigade located at the Damiya Bridge on the Jordan River equipped with M47 and M48 Patton tanks. Additionally, Brig. Gen. Peled's force had the difficult task of fighting an armoured battle across mountainous countryside, studded with hostile villages while the routes they had to take were in most cases covered by enemy tanks and anti-tank guns waiting in ambush or by dense minefields.

During the afternoon of 5 June, the GOC Northern Command, Brig. Gen. David Elazar ordered Ugda Peled to eliminate the Jordanian heavy artillery units equipped with 'Long Tom' 155mm howitzers, positioned at Burquin and Ya'bad, that were shelling the Ramat David airbase in the Jezreel Valley and the important Wadi Ara road. The task was given to the 45th Armored Brigade under the command of Colonel Moshe Bar-Kochva. His brigade comprised the 39th Tank Battalion commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Adolph Abramovicz, with four companies of M50/M51 Shermans and two armoured infantry battalions in half-tracks, the 25th, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Levi Man, and the 74th, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Uri Ram. The brigade was supported by three self-propelled 120mm



Disguised beneath a rudimentary camouflage scheme of dried mud, a line of commandeered vehicles of the Egged Bus Cooperative transports Israeli troops along the road to Jenin on 6 June.

mortar batteries in half-tracks and a jeep-mounted reconnaissance company. Peled's orders were simple and to the point: 'Go in with all your force and silence the guns – waste no time, you must act before they can knock out the airfield, which is in the middle of the vital air offensive.'

Colonel Bar-Kochva was not too surprised by being given this mission since he had prepared his brigade for just such a task during the three weeks since the emergency call-up. His subordinate commanders had studied maps and aerial photographs of potential objectives and made observation trips to vantage points along the border. Having assembled his commanders, Bar-Kochva held an orders group lasting just ten minutes. Within two hours the 45th Armored Brigade had begun its assault on the Jordanian positions. With Major Avitar's reconnaissance company in the lead, Col. Ram's task force of the 74th Armored Infantry Battalion plus a company of Sherman tanks crashed through the Jordanian outer positions and moved onwards through dense olive groves. Lieutenant Motke, who was commanding the leading Sherman platoon, recalls that harrowing night ride:

> We had already passed several Jordanian outposts and saturated them with fire. I did not know it then, but one of my tanks and the recovery section halftrack, the tank being commanded by the Company Sergeant Major [CSM], sighted something hidden in an olive grove, which looked to his veteran's eye to be part of an enemy artillery gun position. Without hesitation he charged in with his tank and fired, blowing up the enemy ammunition reserves, which exploded in a tremendous ruckus! It later turned out that he had blown up one of the 'Long Tom' gun positions.

However, Motke was now frantically searching for an opening for his tanks into the woods, 'I directed my driver along what turned out to be just a goat track, barely visible, but it was the only way through so in we went. We immediately came under heavy small arms fire, so responded with our coaxial machine guns and .50-calibre heavy machine guns. By now the sun was setting, and the dust we raised with our tracks made visibility even more difficult.' Colonel Ram's force had lost half its tanks behind an impossible traffic jam as they tried to squeeze through a small village in the dark.

The lead vehicle had taken a wrong turning and was now hopelessly lost. With no time to round up his missing tanks, he decided to press on with just six Shermans towards the Jordanian positions on Burquin Hill. As he recalled

> I was just behind the lead Sherman, driving in total darkness through the olive groves, when suddenly the tank commander in front of me flicked on his Xenon searchlight and to our horror, no more than fifty metres away it illuminated the huge bulk of an M-47 tank with its 90mm gun pointing directly at us. Evidently both tank commanders were equally surprised to see one another and ordered their gunners to fire simultaneously – fortunately both missed. However, ours reloaded and fired again and scored a direct hit, causing the enemy tank to explode in a ball of fire, which lit up the entire battlefield. I could then see several more enemy tanks moving about on the hill and decided that it was a case of now or never, namely, to go in and start destroying the enemy with just the small force I had at my immediate disposal. So I ordered my six Shermans to spread out in line and charge towards the enemy tanks I had just seen on Burquin Hill. We did so and there was total confusion. The enemy seemed to be completely taken by surprise, having, like us, no sophisticated night vision devices. However, my tanks' commanders kept flicking on their Xenon lamps as they stormed the hill on which I had seen the Pattons deploying. A Jordanian ammunition truck exploded, lighting up the whole horrifying battle scene as we charged recklessly into the fray, with all guns blazing! Soon enemy tanks were burning all over the hill, their surviving crews scrambling out of their blazing steel coffins. Within minutes it seemed that we had destroyed an entire company of Pattons, losing just a single tank – its crew safe, with just minor wounds. It was a miracle, Burquin was ours that night.

THE BATTLE OF KABATIYA JUNCTION

At about midnight news came though that intelligence had intercepted enemy radio transmissions, indicating that the Jordanian 40th Armoured Brigade, commanded by Colonel Rakan Yazi, was advancing along two axes directly towards the 45th Armored Brigade. To both commanders – Bar-Kochva and Rakan Yazi – Kabatiya Junction represented a vital strategic objective because it dominated the Dothan Valley and all the surrounding area. As first light approached the race was on and whoever got there first would in all probability win the battle. Meanwhile other operations in Samaria were under way now fully supported by aircraft from the IAF, which, having dealt with the Egyptian Air Force, had then turned its attention on the Jordanian and Syrian air forces. Both were wiped out on the afternoon of 5 June. Advancing on two axes, Col. Moshe Bar-Kochva's 45th Armored Brigade, followed by Col. Aharon Avnon's 9th Reserve Infantry Brigade, had made their way towards Ya'abad in the west and Jenin in the south. The Israeli plan was to take Jenin from the south in a wide outflanking move that would secure the high ground that overlooked the town. Bar-Kochva's mechanized infantry had a fierce battle with the Jordanians, but eventually secured the area, then moved on to take the Kabatiya Junction in order to cut Jenin off from most of the West Bank, including the town of Nablus. The Jordanians counterattacked and tried to envelop Bar-Kochva's forces from both flanks in a night attack but the elderly Shermans in the hands of determined crews proved more than a match for the more modern M48 American Pattons of the Jordanians, causing

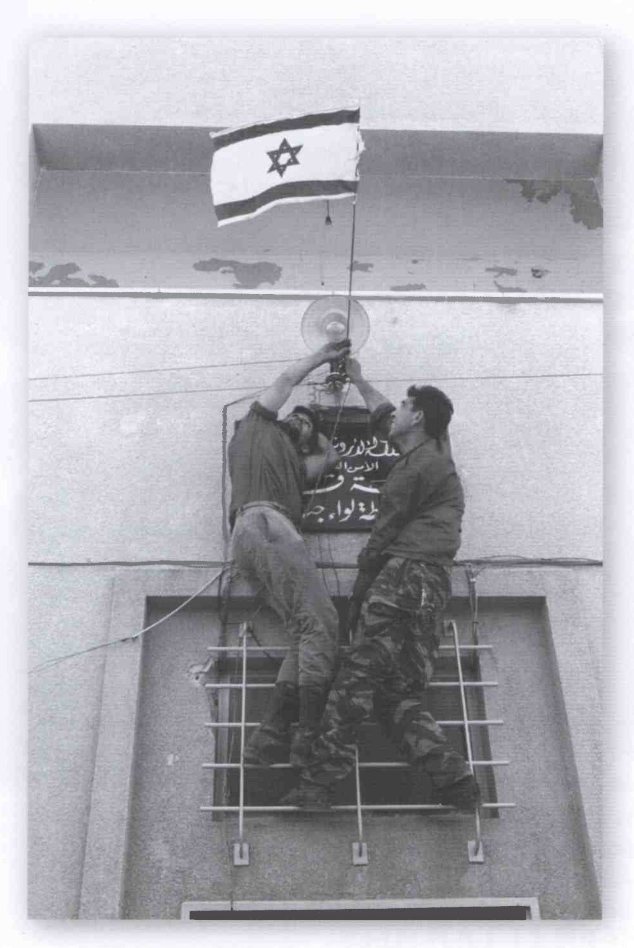


Members of the Israeli Border Police, the Magav, patrol the streets of Jenin with loudhailers to impose a curfew on the town's inhabitants.

them to withdraw in disorder. Then the combined Israeli brigades advanced into Jenin, opposed by some 30 Jordanian Pattons. A bitter battle ensued with Bar-Kochva's forces finally occupying the vital ground to the south-east and south-west of the town.

Meanwhile Gen. Peled had moved the 37th Armored Brigade under Col. Uri Ram to the east of Jenin with the aim of opening up the Jenin–Tubas road so that they could then advance on Nablus from the east. Initially all went well as they broke through the enemy anti-tank gun screen, taking Tilfit, but were then engaged at long range by enemy tanks. A duel ensued and lasted throughout the day. The Jordanian positions had excellent coverage of the road and commanded the entire valley. Colonel Ram resorted to sending small armoured sub-units down into the valley in an effort to draw enemy fire so that their positions could be determined from their gun flashes. This continued all day, then at dusk a Jordanian tank squadron was seen moving its position and was struck by a highly effective air strike, setting a number of the tanks on fire. At last light, using the burning tanks as reference points Col. Ram mounted a night attack and managed to reach the village of Akabar. His brigade then advanced and captured Tubas in a surprise assault. Leaving the majority of his force at the junction to cover the road from the Damiya Bridge where the Jordanian 40th Armoured Brigade was stationed. Additionally he rightly suspected that there must be other armoured units still unaccounted for in the Tubas area.

The Jordanian sector command had meanwhile called for reinforcements and two tank regiments of the 40th Armoured Brigade were soon on their way westwards from the Damiya Bridge in a two-pronged move. The 4th Tank Regiment, plus supporting self-propelled artillery and mechanized infantry, pushed forwards through Tubas towards the Kabatiya Junction while the



Israeli soldiers hoist the Star of David above the entrance of the police headquarters in Jenin, one of the largest towns in the West Bank.

2nd Tank Regiment went for the equally vital intersection at Araba. Although Jenin was taken during the night by infantry supported by Sherman tanks, the Israelis were unable to link up their forces, due to the strong pressure from the 40th Armoured Brigade. Additionally, IDF supply and engineer columns on their way towards Kabatiya were now in grave danger. The brigade commander sized up the situation, suspended operations in Jenin and, leaving the Israeli infantry there to fend for themselves, he withdrew his armour into a position of all-round defence on a nearby hill. He then called in two flights of IAF Super Mystères to strike the Jordanians on their flank and at Kabatiya, obtaining temporary relief to enable him to reorganize and resupply his forces. However, the Jordanian commander, Col. Rakan Anad, soon realized what was happening and ordered a two-pronged, all-out attack on the Israeli hilltop position. One prong was to engage the Israelis frontally, whilst the other attacked from Araba in the south-west to sever the Israeli armour's supply route. The plan was well conceived and timed, but poorly executed. The southern force attacked on time and knocked out several engineer half-tracks, but several Jordanian Pattons were then knocked out at close range by the Israeli Shermans bringing the attack to a halt. The frontal attack also broke down under heavy Israeli fire and several Jordanian tanks were knocked out. But there was worse to come. An Israeli force of AMX-13 light tanks, plus a company of Centurions and some Shermans of the 37th Armored Brigade, moved up a minor track into the rear of the Jordanian brigade. They skirted around an anti-tank blocking position and surprised the Jordanians who broke and ran. Continuing their laborious climb up and over the rocky hills, they eventually reached their main objective and by midnight had knocked out over 35 Jordanian M48s and several M113 APCs at Sabeda, some distance to the east of Kabatiya Junction, where the Jordanian 40th Armoured Brigade was now positioned facing west but in a parlous state after heavy fighting.

Another success was the silencing of the 'Long Toms', although initially, once the tanks had overrun the Jordanian positions and pushed on, the enemy regained their guns and started firing again. However, following the tanks was the battalion quartermaster and his administrative team moving up supplies. Not knowing that the gun positions had been reoccupied by the enemy, the tank commander had ordered him to remove the breechblocks from the 'Long Toms' in order to render them unserviceable. When the group moved in to do so, they discovered that the position was still in Jordanian hands and still active. The quartermaster and three elderly volunteers promptly stormed the position from the rear and recaptured the guns. He then set about calmly removing the breechblocks so that, once and for all, the threat to Ramat David airbase, the most important in northern Israel, ceased.

Undoubtedly one of the major factors in Israel's favour was total air supremacy. It hindered every move the Jordanians made and rendered any

movement of troops in daylight liable to summary attack. Conversely, IDF ground troops were able to receive immediate air support whenever it was requested, including at night by means of flares. That, for example, was how the IDF was able to penetrate the Jenin sector and the Jordanian positions north of Jerusalem. At all times air support was available except when the Israelis imposed their own restrictions, although to the Jordanians there seemed to be scant distinction between civilian and military targets. During the war, the IAF undertook 597 sorties against Jordan of which 549 were ground attack. One senior Jordanian officer described the effect that this had on the Jordanian forces, saying: '... we were not merely fighting infantry and armoured forces. With our limited capability we were also fighting air strikes that were continuous night and day.' Without the promised air support of Egyptian, Iraqi or Syrian aircraft, the Jordanians were doomed to defeat.

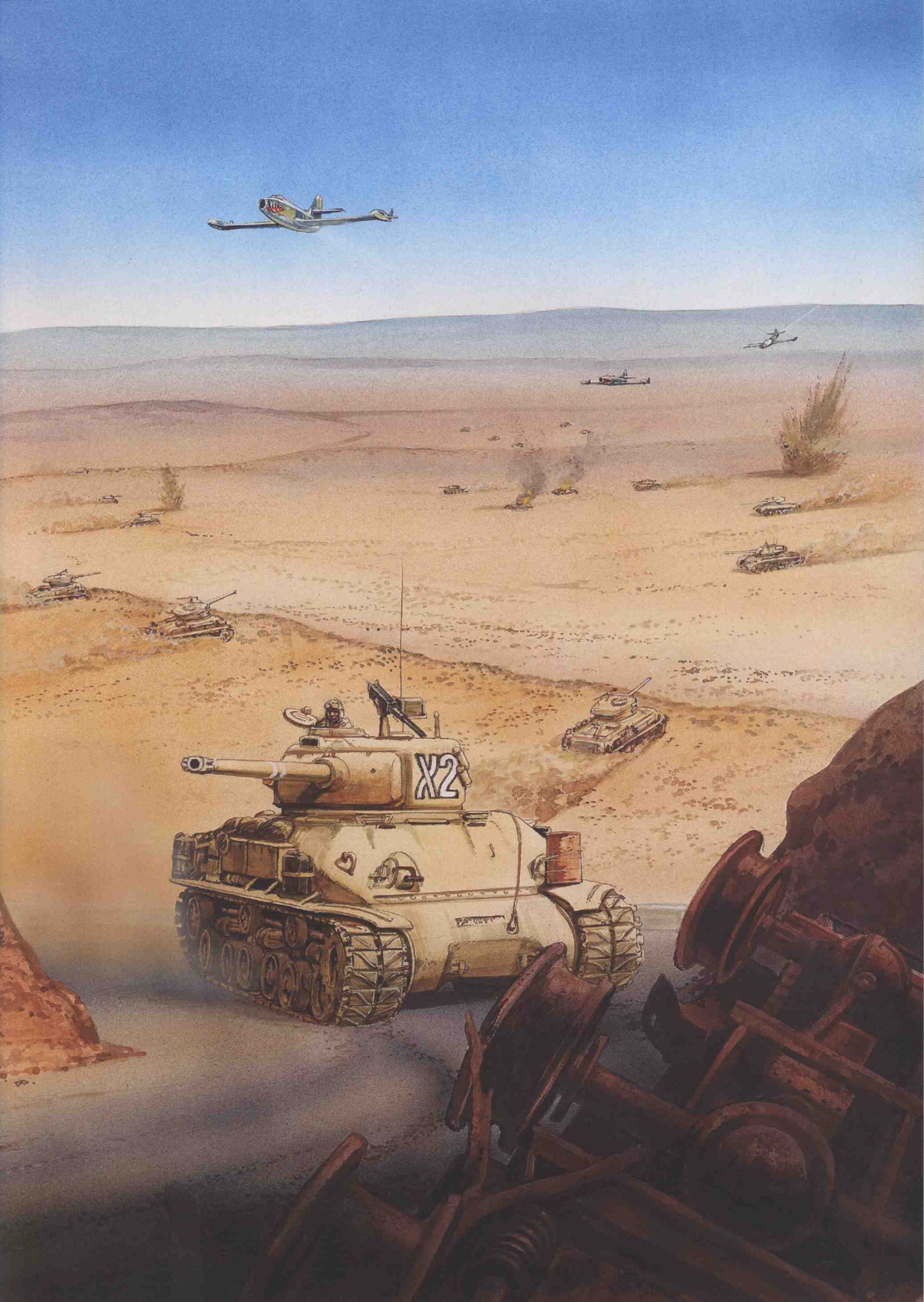
THE BATTLE FOR JERUSALEM

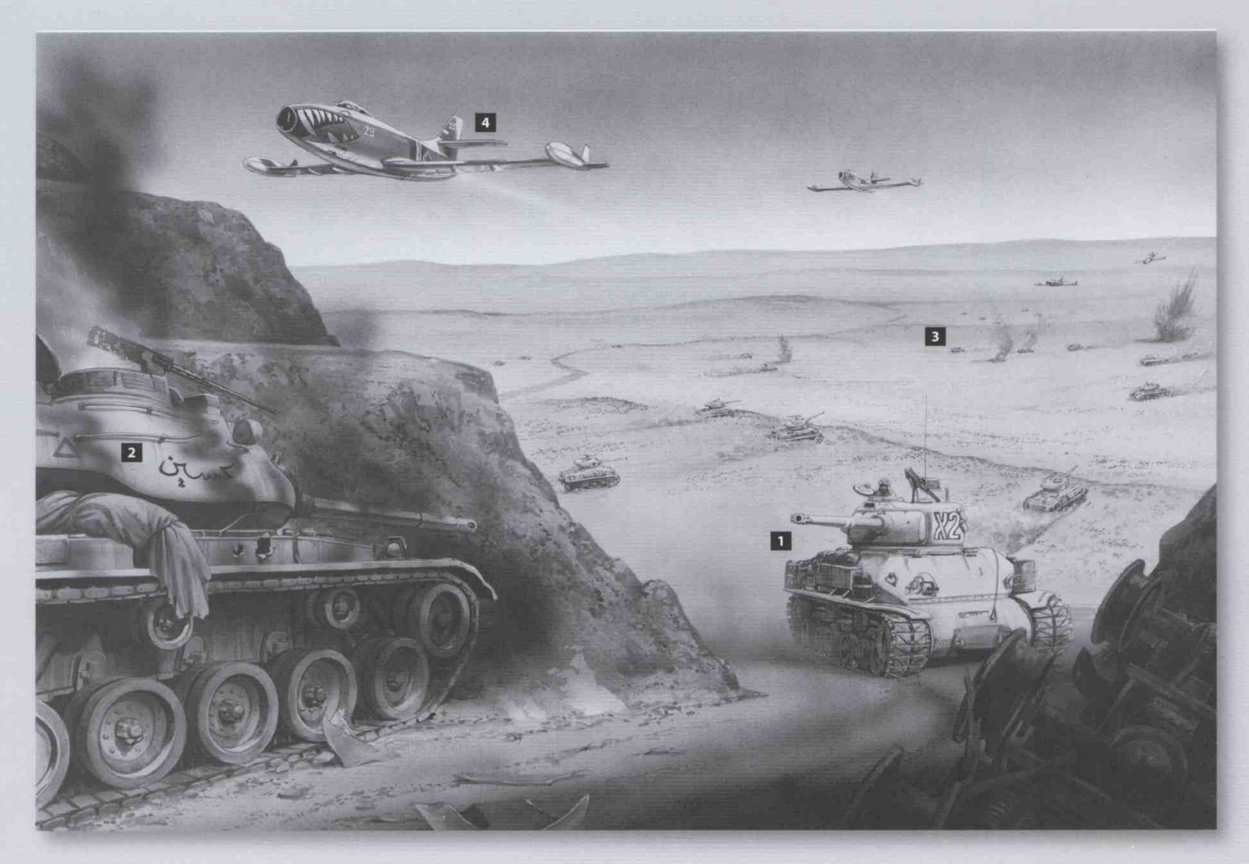
Soon after 0900hrs on the morning of Monday 5 June, rifle and machine-gun fire crackled across the Armistice Line into Israeli-held West Jerusalem but it was not until 1000hrs that the Jordanian bombardment began in earnest, with targets being struck inside Israel proper including the suburbs of Tel Aviv and IAF bases. At 1150hrs, 16 Hawker Hunters of the Jordanian Air Force made a series of attacks around Netanya, killing one civilian and wounding seven others. Soon after, aircraft of the Iraqi and Syrian air forces struck at targets in northern Israel, including Kibbutz Degania, the home of Prime Minister Levi Eshkol and Major-General Mordechai Hod, the commander of the IAF. Although material damage was slight, with seven chicken coops and an old people's home hit, the psychological impact was significant. This meant war with Jordan. The IDF Central Command was ordered to initiate operations in the West Bank and Jerusalem while Maj. Gen. Hod directed the IAF to attack Iraqi, Jordanian and Syrian airfields. At 1230hrs, the IAF struck back and within nine minutes both Jordanian military airbases were rendered



A bazooka team of the 16th Etzioni Jerusalem Infantry Brigade prepares to fire their weapon against a Jordanian position in the Old City of Jerusalem on the opening day of the war.


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THE BATTLE OF THE DOTHAN VALLEY, SAMARIA, 6 JUNE 1967 (pp. 48–49)

At the outset, the main aim of the Israeli offensive into northern Samaria was to eliminate the 155mm 'Long Tom' howitzers that were bombarding targets in Israel including the vital Ramat David airbase. In the van was the 45th Armored Brigade commanded by Col. Moshe Bar-Kochva comprising three tank battalions with some 100 tanks, mostly M50 and M51 Shermans. The assault began at 1700hrs on 5 June and soon encountered stiff Jordanian resistance from the M47 Pattons of the 47th Tank Battalion that was defending the town of Jenin. The battle raged all night before Jenin was taken. On the following day, 6 June, the Jordanians committed their armoured reserves with the deployment of the 40th Armoured Brigade equipped with M47 and M48 Pattons to the Dothan Valley despite attacks from the Israeli Air Force. Battle was joined at the important road junction at Kabatiya. The Jordanian Pattons of the 4th Tank Battalion were deployed along a ridgeline in hull-down positions overlooking Kabatiya while the 2nd Tank Battalion enveloped the reconnaissance company of the 45th from the south. Throughout the day, Bar-Kochva's tanks made repeated attacks to reach the surrounded recce elements losing 17 Shermans in the process. Here, an M50 Sherman (**1**) eases its way past the burning hulk of an M47 Patton (**2**) of A Squadron of 2nd Tank Battalion, 40th Armoured Brigade. Meanwhile in the background, the battle for the Dothan Valley rages between the M50 and M51 Shermans of the 45th Armored Brigade and the Pattons of 4th Tank Battalion, 40th Armoured Brigade (**3**). Overhead, Dassault MD 450 Ouragons (**4**) of No. 113 Squadron bomb and strafe the Jordanian tanks with devastating effect. The battle of the Dothan Valley was the largest tank-versus-tank encounter of the Jordanian campaign. Only eight Pattons of the 40th escaped from the West Bank.



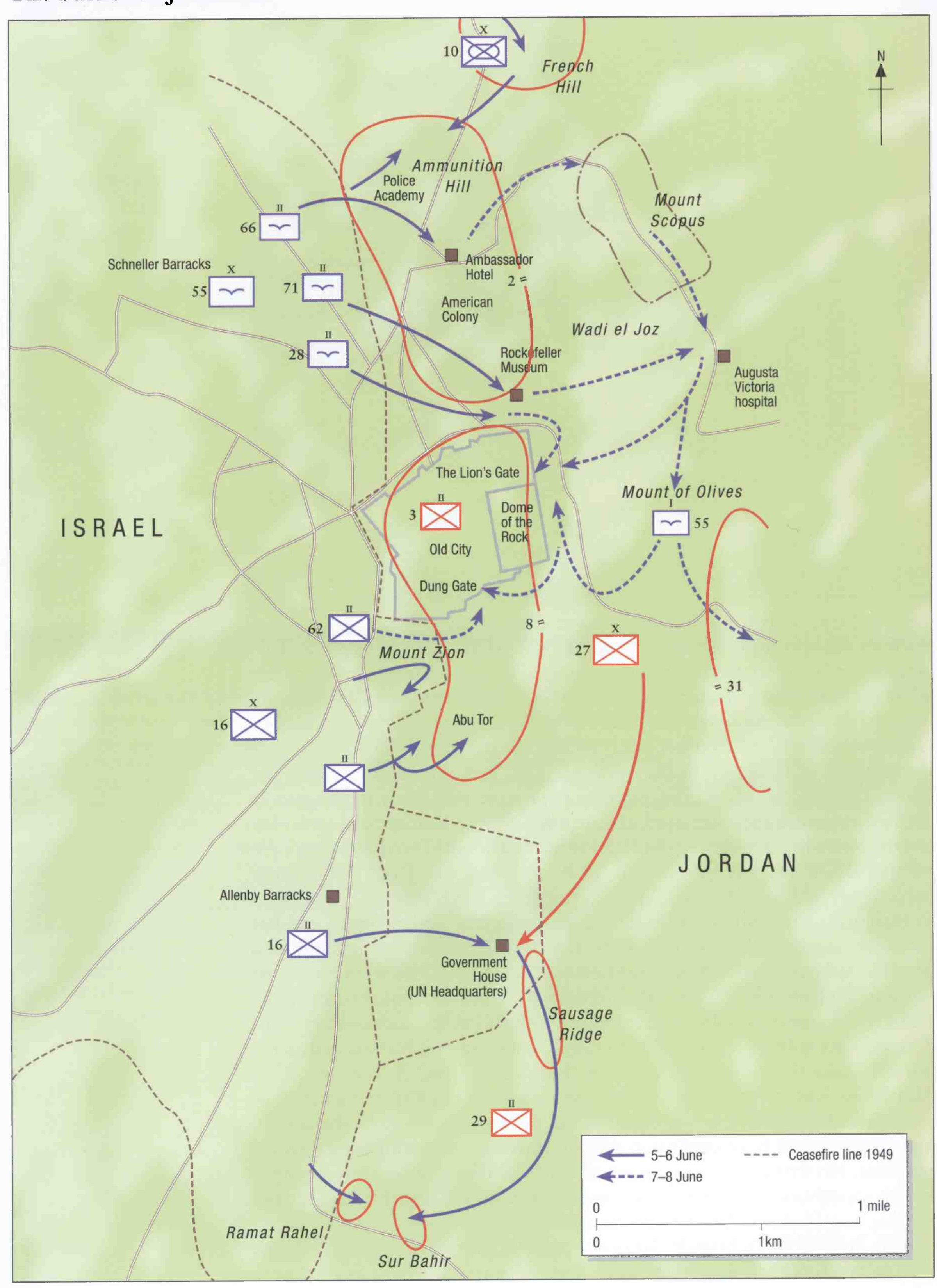
Colonel Mordechai 'Motta' Gur (bareheaded in the centre) issues orders to his command group of the 55th Paratroop Brigade on the Mount of Olives with the Dome of the Rock in the background – the ultimate objective of the campaign where the Western Wall is situated.

inoperable. A second strike at 1310hrs completed the destruction of the Jordanian Air Force in just 52 sorties. To add insult to injury, the IAF riddled King Hussein's personal office at the Basman Palace with cannon and rocket fire, but fortunately for him he was absent at the time.

With the opening of a second front, the IDF hastily revised its plans. Two brigades of Northern Command were directed to invest Samaria to the north while the 10th Harel Mechanized Brigade was reassigned from GHQ reserve to Central Command as was the 55th Paratroop Brigade. The latter had been tasked to undertake a combat jump to capture the airfield at El Arish but the advance of Ugda Tal in the northern Sinai had been so rapid that the operation was cancelled. The paratroopers were still lying in the sun at Tel Nof airbase in their full combat gear when fresh orders arrived to deploy to Jerusalem. In the words of the IDF historian, Colonel David Eshel, 'ample compensation for having had El Arish snatched out from under their parachutes!' although this would mean losing the much coveted red backing to their parachute wings awarded to those who had undertaken a combat jump. To Brig. Gen. Uzi Narkiss, GOC Central Command, it was a godsend or as he declared: 'The 55th dropped on us from heaven.' He went on to say: 'However it [the fighting] started in Jerusalem, I knew it would end up in the Old City.' As soon as Colonel Mordechai 'Motta' Gur, the commander of the 55th Paratroop Brigade, arrived at Central Command HQ Narkiss instructed him: 'To take whatever you can while there's still light.' At the time, Col. Motta Gur was the youngest brigade commander in the IDF and a native of Jerusalem. Fortunately, a few days before, he had reconnoitred the terrain and the Jordanian positions just in case – a classic example of Israeli forward planning. His first priority was to secure the Israeli enclave on Mount Scopus but his thoughts continued to dwell on the Old City and once his men arrived by bus, he told them: 'We will free Jerusalem!'

The bulk of Gur's brigade did not depart Tel Nof airbase until 1900hrs, leaving much of their equipment and support weapons behind as they were

The battle for Jerusalem





An Israeli paratrooper of the 55th Paratroop Brigade returns fire with his Uzi sub-machine gun during the battle for Old Jerusalem on 5 June.

still palletized for the parachute drop on El Arish. On arrival in Jerusalem, the paratroopers were obliged to collect spare equipment from the depot of the 16th Etzioni Jerusalem Infantry Brigade. Furthermore, the brigade had no training in urban warfare, few maps or aerial photographs and the commanders had little knowledge of Jerusalem itself, so personnel from the resident Etzioni Brigade were attached to all the parachute units. Nevertheless, a plan was formulated in under five hours and the brigade was ready to fight by midnight of 5 June, but, as Colonel Arik Akhmon, the brigade intelligence officer recalled, 'The problem was not how to do it right but how to avoid doing it terrible.' GHQ favoured a dawn attack in order to maximize fire support and air strikes but Brig. Gen. Narkiss insisted on a night assault starting at 0200hrs as he realized time was of the essence and heavy artillery support would do untold damage to the city and its inhabitants. The brigade objectives were to capture the Arab sector to the north of the Old City walls including the Jordanian Police Academy, Ammunition Hill, the Sheikh Jarrah area and the American Colony, with the final aim of relieving the Israeli enclave on Mount Scopus, encompassing the Hadassah Hospital and the Hebrew University. This enclave was highly vulnerable to a Jordanian attack from both nearby Augusta Victoria or French Hill.

The Jordanian positions were formidable, with strong field fortifications of deep concrete bunkers on the high ground and all open stretches wired and mined. The Jordanian troops were competent and well trained with the fortifications being manned by one of Jordan's better units – the 3rd 'Talal' Infantry Brigade. The elite battalion of this brigade was the 2nd 'al-Husseini' Battalion under the command of Major Mansur Krashnur, a veteran soldier with battle experience against the Israelis. One of the many actions he had fought was at Qalqilya in the West Bank in October 1956, when his opponent had been a young battalion commander named Major Motta Gur. Now, 11 years later Gur and Krashnur were about to meet again – this time in the battle for Ammunition Hill, so called because it had been a British Army ammunition storage depot during the British Mandate. Ammunition Hill was the strongest position of all and over the years the Israelis had obtained excellent intelligence about the fortress, but unfortunately this information remained in a safe in the HQ of the Etzioni Brigade and it was never passed to the paratroopers.

THE BATTLE FOR AMMUNITION HILL

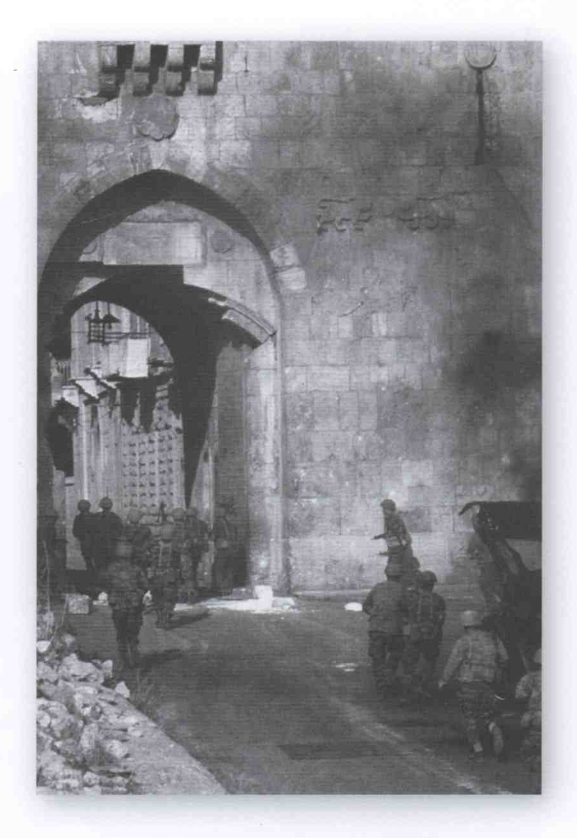
In the event, the assault began at 0220hrs with a sharp artillery barrage, while two large searchlights mounted on the roof of the Histadrut building (Federation of Labour) illuminated targets for ground attack aircraft and diversionary air support. The brigade assault included all three battalions attacking in echelon from the left with a battalion from the 16th Etzioni Jerusalem Brigade held in reserve while direct fire support was provided by 76mm-armed Sherman tanks of the 16th Etzioni Jerusalem Brigade. At the northern end of the line was the 66th Paratroop Battalion and its first objective was the Jordanian Police Academy. It was defended by a 140-man company of the 2nd 'al-Husseini' Battalion under the command of Captain Suliman Salayta, a Palestinian. The barbed-wire defences were breached by 'Bangalore' torpedoes and then the paratroopers poured into the trenches under intense machine-gun and mortar fire. They immediately began to suffer heavy casualties. Each trench line, each fire bay and each bunker had to be taken one by one. While one paratrooper lobbed a hand grenade into the next bay, another would rush round the corner on hearing the explosion and spray the position with automatic fire from his Uzi sub-machine gun while bunkers were attacked at close hand by grenades and prepared explosive charges. Time and again there were acts of extraordinary courage such as that carried out by Private Shlomo Epstein. At the start of the battle for the Jordanian Police Academy, his unit came under a hail of fire from enemy artillery, mortars, machine guns and other weapons. Epstein, a medical aide ran from one to the other of the scores of wounded and saved many lives by his prompt care. He seemed to be oblivious to the shot and shell. He was tending one wounded paratrooper and had just told him, 'You'll be all right', when they both heard the noise of a mortar bomb coming close. Without a second thought Epstein covered the wounded man with his body and was killed. The wounded man survived and as he said later, 'I realized in that split second he was giving his life to save mine.' In 90 minutes, the paratroopers of A Company destroyed 34 bunkers and machine-gun nests, but still the Jordanians fought on until the Israelis were just 15m (49ft) from Capt. Salayta's command post whereupon he called down an artillery barrage on his



The battle of Ammunition Hill in Jerusalem was one of the bloodiest of the war. This view was taken soon after the war but the deep Jordanian trenches remain as a memorial to this day.

own position. He then fell back to Ammunition Hill with the remnants of his company, leaving 17 dead and 42 wounded at the Jordanian Police Academy, which fell at 0345hrs.

Next on the agenda was the fortress atop Ammunition Hill and the heaviest fighting of all. The position was attacked in a three-pronged pincer movement by two companies supported by Sherman tanks, which were largely ineffectual in the dark. The Jordanian resistance was fierce and sustained under the determined leadership of Maj. Mansur Krashnur. Many acts of bravery were displayed during the ferocious battle on Ammuniton Hill including Private Eitan Neveh. At one point in the deadly fighting on the hill that was criss-crossed with enemy trenches and bunkers, Neveh was one of a small group of paratroopers battling in a trench when they came under grenade attack from above. To enable his group to advance Neveh climbed out of the trench with his Uzi sub-machine gun, fully exposed to the enemy, and ran along the parapet giving covering fire to his comrades below, alternately spraying the enemy soldiers ahead of him and then those ahead of his comrades. He kept this up for 27m (30 yards) before he was killed in a hail of fire. His heroism allowed his comrades to gain their objective. He was awarded the IDF's highest decoration for bravery – the Medal of Valor.

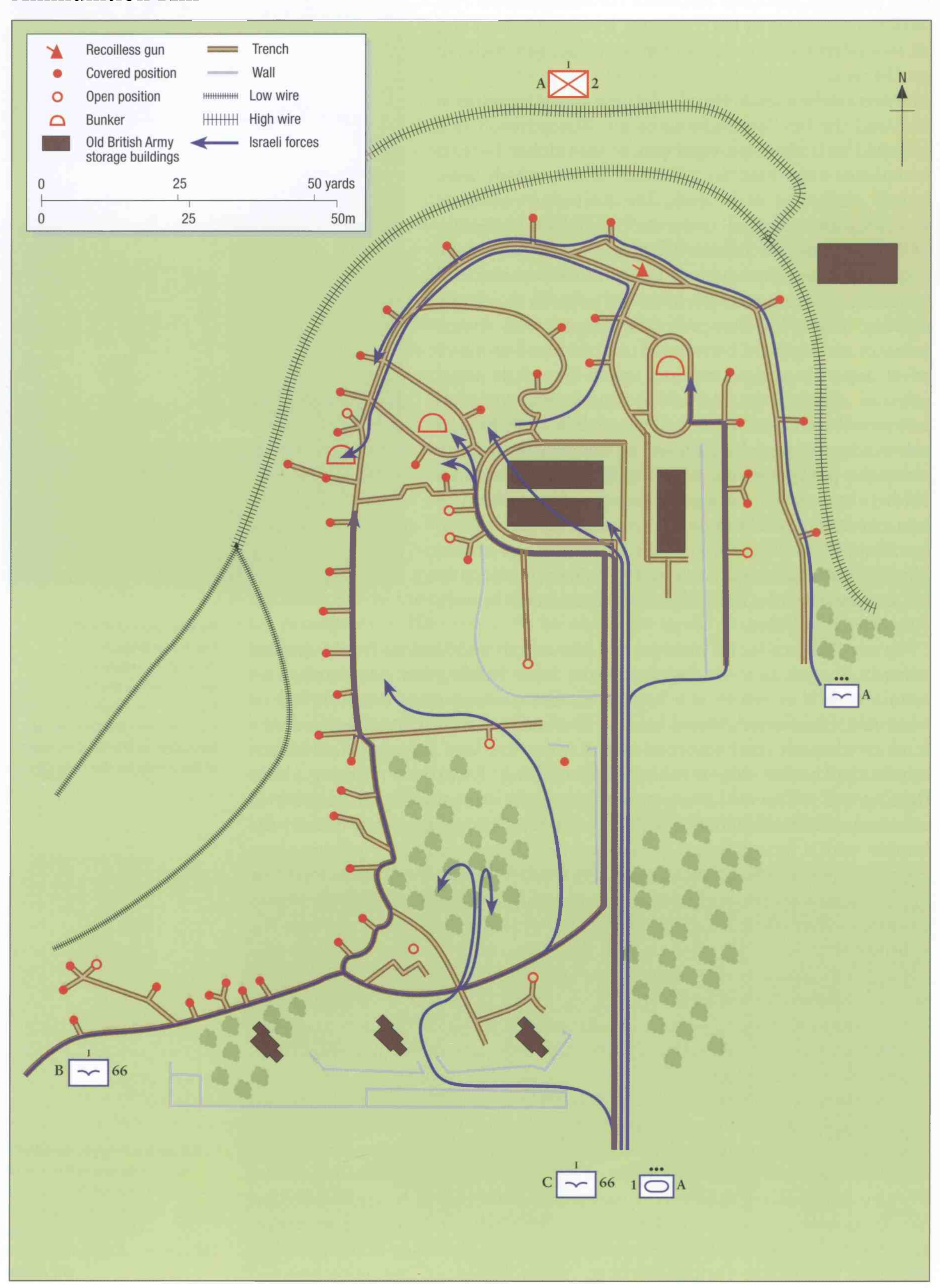


Paratroopers of the 55th Paratroop Brigade rush through St Stephen's Gate, also known as the Lion Gate from the bas-reliefs beside the archway, into the Old City of Jerusalem in the final moments of the battle for the Holy City.

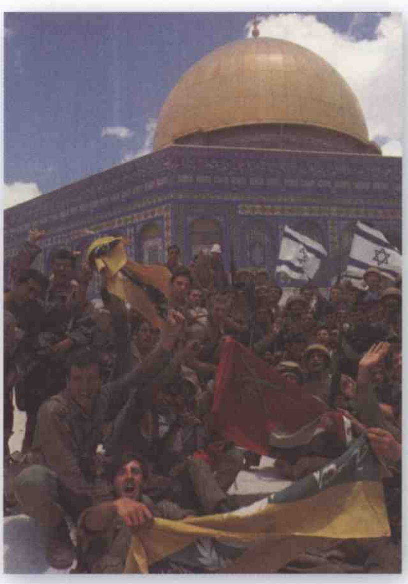
In another action, Privates Jacov Haimovitch and Shalom David showed conspicuous gallantry during the battle. After battling his way through an enemy trench in which the rest of his detachment were either killed or wounded, Haimovitch found his way blocked by a heavily fortified concrete bunker where several trenches met. Enemy fire was intense. Haimovitch recalls that he felt 'like a robot. I felt nothing. I was just thinking about fighting well to survive.' A few moments later, he was joined by Shalom David who had a similar experience with his own detachment. Efforts to destroy the bunker with a bazooka and grenades failed. When two other paratroopers appeared, one of whom had an explosive satchel charge, they decided to blow up the bunker. David worked his way around one side, fighting off the enemy coming at him from another trench, while Haimovitch crept towards the entrance to cover it. He then handed the 20kg satchel charge to David who coolly placed it against the bunker, destroying it. Haimovitch then burst inside and shot dead whoever had survived the attack. The whole operation was carried out under a continuous barrage of machine-gun fire and grenades. Then, with a handful of survivors from other detachments, they went on to capture their next objective.

Then there was Corporal Yigael Arad to whom scores of paratroopers owed their lives. Arad was with the fighting sections throughout the long night of battle in the confined and powerful Jordanian stronghold. He was with them in the trenches during the hand-to-hand fighting, tending the wounded as they were hit and enabling others to go on fighting, although he himself had to use his Uzi against attacking enemy soldiers in between bandaging the wounded. He replenished his supplies from other medical orderlies who had been wounded earlier on. Only seven men out of his entire company emerged

Ammunition Hill







unscathed. The fighting intensified as dawn broke, making it easier for both artillery forward observation officers and snipers to see their targets. With sufficient daylight, three Sherman tanks moved forward to eliminate the remaining bunkers on Ammunition Hill with point-blank direct fire. One tank was hit and knocked out. It remains as a memorial on Ammunition Hill to this day. After the battle, the positions at the Jordanian Police Academy and Ammunition Hill were littered with the bodies of 106 Jordanian soldiers and least as many wounded. The paratroopers lost 37 dead and some 150 wounded out of a force of 500. It was arguably the hardest battle of the war and the paratroopers honoured their adversary by formally returning the Jordanian dead once the hostilities were over in a gesture of mutual respect.

In the meantime, the 28th and 71st paratroop battalions had been in action throughout the night, attacking against stiff Jordanian resistance in the Sheikh Jarrah district and capturing the American Colony and the Rockefeller Museum as they encroached ever closer to the walls of the Old City. By 0800hrs, Motta Gur's 55th Paratroop Brigade had fought itself to a standstill. Although elated by an extraordinary feat of arms, it needed to regroup and reorganize as well as ensuring the safe evacuation of the wounded and the recovery of the dead. The brigade had lost 75 killed and over 300 wounded in just five hours of fighting. Of their armour support, every tank commander had been hit and the tanks were reduced to a single shell apiece while half of the vehicles were no longer mobile owing to battle damage or breakdown. A tank repair shop was promptly set up in the yard of the Police Academy.

Mopping-up operations continued until 1000hrs by which time all their immediate objectives had been secured. They then began to advance from Ammunition Hill in the north, through Sheikh Jarrah to the Ambassador Hotel and down to Wadi el Joz (Jawz) to gain Mount Scopus and bring relief to the beleaguered garrison there. By midday, the paratroopers had linked up with the 10th Harel Mechanized Brigade on French Hill. Thirty minutes later, Gen. Dayan and Brig. Gen. Narkiss drove by half-track to Mount Scopus from where they had an uninterrupted view of the Old City of Jerusalem. Dayan ordered Narkiss to capture the commanding heights behind it to the east, including the Augusta Victoria ridge and the Mount of Olives. With these

LEFT
Israeli troops tend to their wounded during fighting along the ancient walls of the Old City of Jerusalem.

RIGHT
The Star of David flies amongst flags captured from the Jordanian Army as Israeli troops celebrate the capture of the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. The Dome of the Rock is the oldest extant Islamic building in the world and is the third most holy site for Muslims. It is built over the ruins of the Second Temple. On 7 June, Dayan ordered that no Israeli flag should fly above the dome of the Mosque of Omar.



Israeli troops return fire against Jordanian snipers during the battle of Jerusalem.

features in Israeli hands, the Old City of Jerusalem would be surrounded by the IDF before any ceasefire could be imposed. He then flew by helicopter back to Tel Aviv. It was time for a momentous decision.

THE BIG LIE

It was also decision time for King Hussein. In Amman, Gen. Riadh informed the king that he must seek a ceasefire or risk losing his kingdom entirely. It was now obvious that the Iraqis, Saudi Arabians and the Syrians were unwilling to assist Jordan in the war against Israel. Jordanian resistance in the West Bank was crumbling with horrendous reports of casualties as field commanders attempted to ameliorate their defeats at the hands of the Israelis. Nevertheless, King Hussein wished to fight on and decided to consult President Nasser of Egypt over the telephone despite the UAC having secure communications equipment. After an exchange of pleasantries, the conversation went as follows:

> NASSER: We are also fighting fiercely. We have been fighting on all fronts throughout the night.
> HUSSEIN: [Indecipherable]
> NASSER: However, if there is anything in the beginning, never mind. We will do better. Allah is with us. Is Your Majesty going to issue a statement on the subject of the American and British participation?
> HUSSEIN: [Indecipherable]
> NASSER: I say it would be better for us to issue a statement. I will issue a statement and you will issue a statement. We will also let the Syrians issue a statement that there are American and English aircraft acting against us from aircraft carriers. We will issue a statement and thus make the subject more emphatic, I think.
> HUSSEIN: All right.
> NASSER: A thousand thanks, stand firm and we are with you with all our heart. Our aircraft are over Israel today. Our aircraft have been raiding Israel airfields this morning.
> HUSSEIN: [Indecipherable]
> NASSER: A thousand thanks.
> HUSSEIN: Thank you, Abdel Nasser.
> NASSER: Goodbye.





LEFT
An M3 half-track passes through the Lion's Gate into the Old City of Jerusalem on 7 June. The white stripes on the engine covers are an air recognition device.

RIGHT
An infantry team disembark from their M3 half-track in the courtyard of the Rockefeller Museum in East Jerusalem on 7 June.

The intention was to draw the Soviet Union into the conflict and thus, it was hoped, stave off defeat. Within hours, Cairo Radio as well as stations in Amman and Damascus were broadcasting that Britain and the USA were flying combat missions in support of the Israelis from aircraft carriers in the Mediterranean and from the British airbase of Akrotiri on the island of Cyprus. Diplomatic relations were immediately severed between America and Egypt. British diplomats dubbed it the 'Big Lie'. In Washington, DC, President Johnson was disgusted by the total fabrication and any lingering sympathy he had held for President Nasser vanished forever. It was a disaster for the Arab cause. When Nasser and Hussein attempted a damage-limitation exercise through foreign embassies, Israel released a transcript of the incriminating conversation on 8 June: Mossad had tapped the telephone wire. The release was timed to give maximum embarrassment for the Arab leaders and to slow the diplomatic manoeuvres for a ceasefire while there was still unfinished business on the Syrian front. Yet it was the only feasible explanation of the impending defeat that could be given to the 'Arab street', which was still being fed a litany of lies concerning continuing Arab victories on the battlefields while rumours circulating that the Egyptian Air Force had been destroyed were laughed off as ludicrous Israeli propaganda.

At midday on 6 June, little more than 24 hours after Jordan had opened hostilities, Hussein summoned the ambassadors of all the great powers and beseeched them to arrange a ceasefire through the Security Council of the UN. Thereafter, the king decided to visit the Jordan Valley himself and he was horrified by what he saw:

> I will never forget the hallucinating sight of that defeat. Roads clogged with trucks, jeeps and all kinds of vehicles twisted, disembowelled, dented, still smoking, giving off that particular smell of metal and paint burned by exploding bombs – a stink that only powder can make. In the midst of this charnel house were men. In groups of 30 or two, wounded, exhausted, they were trying to clear a path under the monstrous *coup de grâce* being dealt them by a horde of Israeli Mirages screaming in a cloudless blue sky seared with sun.

King Hussein still could not bear the thought of retreat let alone defeat. For his own survival, any ceasefire had to be imposed internationally from outside. But more of his kingdom was soon to fall.

At 2200hrs on 6 June, Gen. Riadh issued an order for all Jordanian troops to withdraw from the West Bank but when news arrived later of the UN

An Israeli Navy patrol boat passes through the Straits of Tiran during Operation *Lights* – the capture of Sharm el Sheikh on 7 June. The Israeli Navy was split geographically between the Mediterranean and Red Seas. By dint of subterfuge, the Navy was able to make the Egyptians deploy almost a third of its naval forces to the Red Sea thus allowing the tiny Israeli Navy to concentrate on its principal role of protecting the Israeli ports on the Mediterranean coastline.

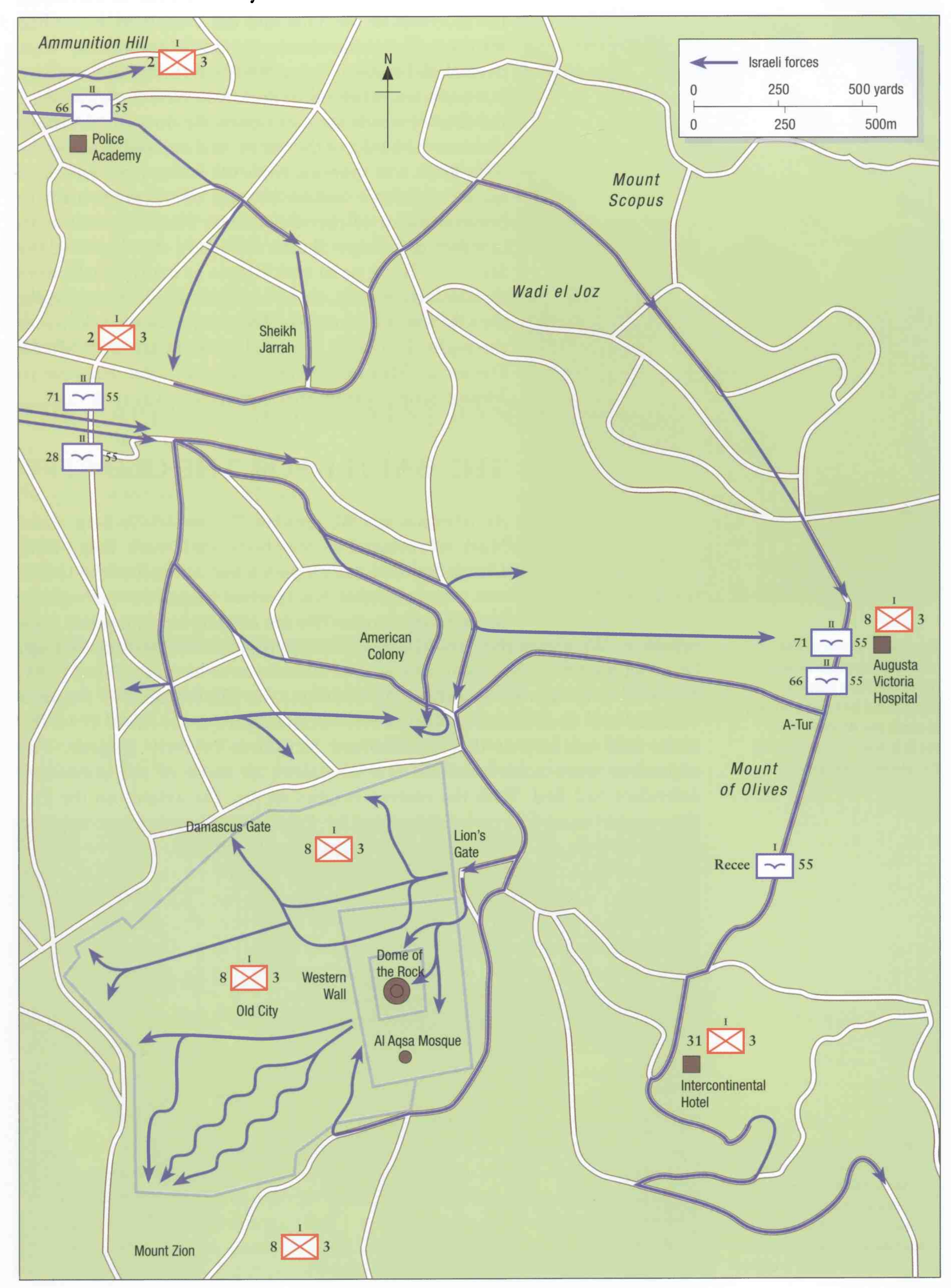


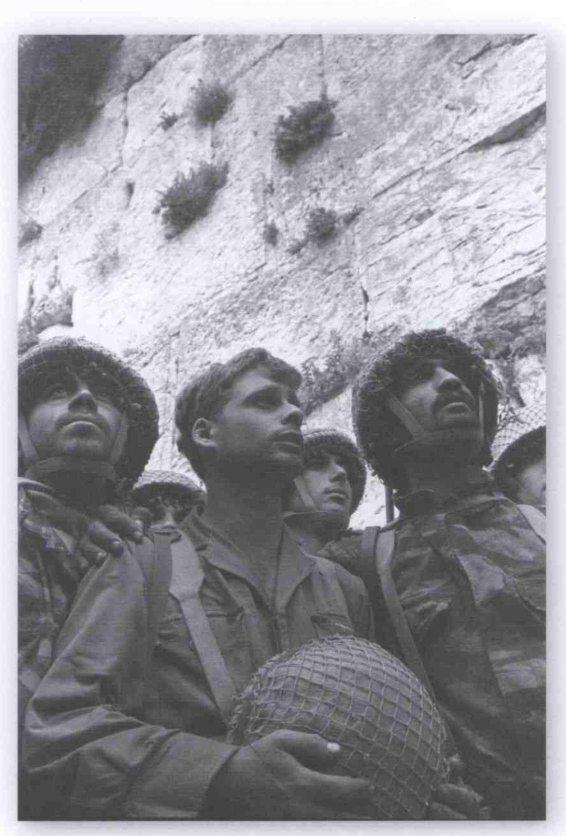
demand for a ceasefire, King Hussein countermanded the order. He could only retain the West Bank under his control with forces on the ground. However, it was too late. Demoralized after incessant air attack, the Jordanian troops were anxious to retreat under the cover of darkness and it proved impossible to reverse the withdrawal. Confusion was compounded by the Egyptian rejection of the ceasefire. In Jerusalem, many troops of the 3rd 'Talal' Infantry Brigade left the city, denuding the defences. The remaining soldiers were hungry and exhausted because they had not been resupplied since the battle began. Communications were now nigh on impossible as there was no means of recharging the radio batteries. The Jordanians were reduced to exchanging information on the public telephone system but the Israelis readily intercepted such messages. Ammunition supplies were critically low and even water was in short supply. The situation was dire.



An M3 half-track carrying paratroopers of the 55th Paratroop Brigade approaches the Dome of the Rock at the culmination of the battle for Jerusalem on 7 June 1967.

Battle for the Old City





This classic image by the renowned photojournalist David Rubinger depicts three of the first paratroopers to reach the Western Wall, the first Jews to stand beside it in almost 1,900 years.

For the Israeli cabinet, it was a time of elation at the successes in the Sinai and the West Bank but it had also to make some serious decisions before they were overtaken by events some 9,650km (6,000 miles) away, but seven hours behind, at the UN in New York following the first demands for a ceasefire. By now Israeli troops were on the banks of the Suez Canal and resistance in the West Bank was sporadic while the Syrian front remained quiet with little action beyond the normal artillery bombardment of the settlements. The choice lay with whether to occupy Sharm el Sheikh, thus opening the Straits of Tiran, or to attack Syria as many Israelis were demanding. Finally, there was the option of occupying the Old City of Jerusalem. The debate went on deep into the night. In reality, the final decision lay with Moshe Dayan as Minister of Defense and, after his visit to Mount Scopus earlier that day, the die was now cast.

THE BATTLE FOR THE OLD CITY

At 0500hrs on Wednesday 7 June 1967, Brig. Gen. Narkiss received a telephone call from Brig. Gen. Chaim Bar Lev, the Deputy Chief of Staff of the IDF. It was a message that Narkiss had longed for throughout his military career: 'We are already being pressed for a ceasefire. We are at the canal [Suez]. The Egyptians have been carved up. Don't let the Old City remain an enclave.' There was to be no repeat of 1948. The Old City was to be taken. At 0830hrs, the hill features of Augusta Victoria and the Mount of Olives were attacked from the Wadi el Joz by tanks and infantry of the 16th Etzioni Jerusalem Infantry Brigade. The objectives were achieved with few casualties as most of the Jordanian defenders had fled. With the eastern heights secure, the assault on the Old City could begin. The task fell to the 55th Paratroop Brigade in a combined operation with the 16th Etzioni Jerusalem Infantry Brigade, as the latter had defended the Israeli quarter of the city for the past 19 years. To Motta Gur, it was the culmination of his brigade's sacrifices so far: 'We stand on a ridge overlooking the Holy City. Soon we will enter the city, the Old City of Jerusalem about which countless generations of Jews have dreamed, to which all living Jews aspire. To our brigade has been granted the privilege of being the first to enter it.'

After a short artillery bombardment, the assault went in, but still there was resistance from the few remaining Jordanian defenders on the walls of the Old City. It is only appropriate that the account of the final assault should be in the words of Col. Motta Gur whose paratroopers had done so much during the capture of the city:

> Seeing the tanks advancing towards the wall, we got into our half-track and went on to catch up with them, while ordering them to go faster. The infantry was ordered to keep up with the tanks. For a moment, I stopped the artillery fire but after our tanks had spotted the enemy positions, we renewed our firing and continued our advance up to the bridge beneath St Stephen's Gate. There

> the tanks found it more difficult to manoeuvre, but it was by this time impossible to check our impetus. I told my driver, Ben Tsur, a bearded fellow weighing some 15 stone, to speed on ahead. We passed the tanks and saw the Gate before us with a burning car outside it. There wasn't a lot of room, but I told him to drive on and so we passed the burning car and saw the Gate half open in front. Regardless of the danger that somebody might drop grenades into our half-track from above, he pushed on and flung the door aside, crunched over the fallen stones, passed by a dazed Arab soldier, turned left and came to another gate. Here, a motor-cycle blocked the way but, despite the danger of a booby-trap, my driver drove right over it and we reached the Temple Mount. Here there was no more firing for it is a Holy Place.

The time was 0950hrs. By 1015hrs, the paratroopers had gained the Western Wall. The Kotel – the holiest place in the Jewish religious tradition – was finally in Israeli hands.

THE CAPTURE OF THE WEST BANK

While the battle for the Old City was under way, Ugda Peled advanced down the spine of the Samarian Hills to Tubas, and on to the major town of Nablus where they arrived at 1100hrs on 7 June to a rapturous welcome by the local Palestinians. As one bemused Israeli tank crewman recalled, 'Thousands stood at the entrance of Nablus waving white handkerchiefs and applauding ... we entered the town and were surprised the population was so friendly.' Glued to their transistor radios, the inhabitants of Nablus had heard only of Arab victories and they therefore presumed that the unfamiliar vehicles of the armoured column were Iraqis on their way to invade Israel. The reality came as a rude shock and fighting soon broke out with a confused gun battle lasting some six hours. Fierce fighting occurred on the outskirts of the town as the remaining tanks of the 40th Armoured Brigade attempted to withdraw to the Damiya Bridge across the Jordan River to the East Bank. Seventeen Pattons



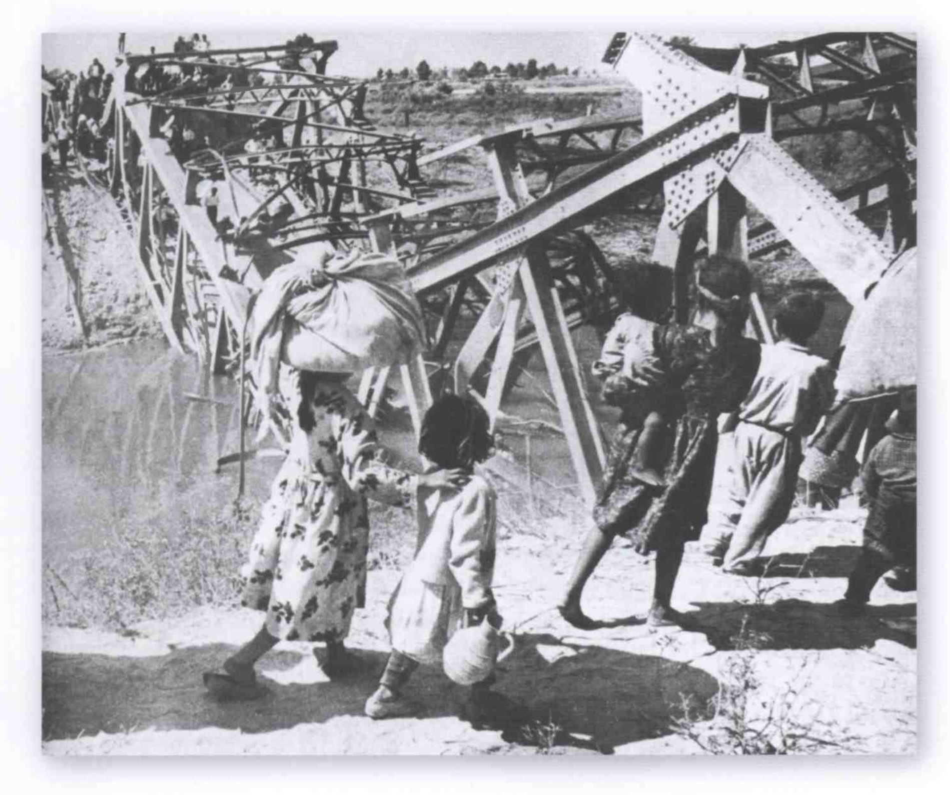
The Western Wall is the most sacred site to Jews the world over although it was in a dilapidated condition when it finally returned to Israeli hands for the first time since the destruction of the Second Temple in AD 70.

were destroyed or abandoned, mainly by the AMX-13 light tanks of the 37th Armored Brigade. The IDF historian, Col. David Eshel, recounts: 'Leaving many burned-out vehicles and many more abandoned self-propelled guns, the pathetic survivors of the battle for the Dothan Valley made their way to the Damiya Bridge. Eight battered Pattons limped across the bridge, all that remained of a once-proud 40th Armoured Brigade.' They were followed by the tanks of the 45th Armored Brigade that captured the bridge that afternoon. Meanwhile, one battalion of the 10th Harel Mechanized Brigade was advancing from Ramallah in the south. The two forces from *ugdas* Narkiss and Peled met south of Nablus to complete the conquest of Samaria.

At the same time, the two other battalions of the 10th, together with the reconnaissance company, moved eastwards towards Jericho. As Col. Ben Ari sardonically commented, 'We continued on to Jericho. We had a few trumpets with us – all that was needed.' They arrived there in the late afternoon to find the city abandoned by Jordanian forces although desultory artillery fire continued from the East Bank. Scattered resistance was encountered from snipers in the city while thousands of Palestinians fled over the bridges across the Jordan River to the East Bank. Following the capture of the Old City, the 16th Etzioni Jerusalem Infantry Brigade began moving southwards along the Judaean Ridge around 1400hrs against minimal resistance. Bethlehem was soon occupied followed by the Etzion Bloc, or *Gush Etzion*, after which the brigade was named. By nightfall, the brigade had reached Hebron when the ceasefire came into effect at 1900 hours on 7 June. On the following morning, Israeli engineers blew up the Allenby, King Abdullah and Shoarat bridges. Metaphorically and physically, the West Bank was now severed from Jordan. It was a consummate victory for the IDF. Initial Jordanian casualties were estimated in the region of 6,000 killed and wounded but these were later revised to 696 dead and 2,500 wounded. The IDF lost 553 killed in action, including 183 in the battle for Jerusalem, and 2,442 wounded. These were the largest casualties of the three campaigns of the Six Day War reflecting the tenacity of Jordanian resistance.

SYRIA AND THE GOLAN HEIGHTS

Although the prime instigator of the war, Syria remained relatively unscathed after four days of general conflict that had seen the destruction of the Egyptian and Jordanian armed forces. Only its air force had been destroyed on day one as part of Operation *Moked*. The Syrian response was to bombard the Israeli settlements and kibbutzim in the Galilee Finger as they had done for years. By Thursday evening, 8 June, the two Syrian artillery battalions of Soviet M46 130mm guns, four companies of heavy mortars and the dug-in World War II German PzKpfw IV tanks dotted along the Golan escarpment had hit 205 houses, two tractor sheds, six barns, 30 tractors,15 cars and nine chicken coops. Besides the chickens, Israeli casualties were two civilians killed and 16 wounded. It did not quite equate with the report by a Syrian artillery observation officer, Captain Ibrahim Aktum, 'The enemy appears to have suffered heavy losses and is retreating.' Still less the



In the immediate aftermath of the war, some quarter of a million Palestinians and Jordanians fled from the West Bank into Gaza and Jordan in a humanitarian crisis of biblical scale.





LEFT
In a graphic image of the problems that the occupation of the West Bank would bring, the crew of an M50 Sherman relax in the main square of Bethlehem, in the shadow of a mosque.

RIGHT
In the days prior to the war, the IDF anticipated heavy losses. In the event, they were relatively light by the standards of World War II, but even so were comparatively more by size of population than all the deaths incurred by the US during the Vietnam War.

declaration by defence minister Hafez al-Assad, subsequently president of Syria for 30 years, which stated: 'At this crucial and historical hour our forces have begun to fight and to bomb the enemy's position along the entire front. These are the first shots in the war of liberation.' On 6 June, three separate company-sized attacks were mounted against Israeli positions near Tel Dan, Kibbutz Dan just to its south and the village She'ar Yashuv some two kilometres (one mile) inside the frontier. These probes were easily repulsed but were probably never intended to capture or hold ground but were merely a token demonstration of Arab solidarity. Anyway, with the earlier destruction of the Syrian Air Force, any notion of a general offensive was fanciful.

Despite the low level of casualties, the kibbutzniks had been forced to live in underground shelters almost permanently while their prized fruit orchards and grain fields were destroyed by fires as a result of the Syrian shelling. The pressure on the Israeli Government grew day by day as the demands by the settlers for a military solution became more strident. The daily newspaper *Ha'aretz* proclaimed: 'The time has come to settle accounts with those who started it all. It is time to finish the job.' As a Degania kibbutznik himself, Prime Minister Levi Eshkol was highly sympathetic to their pleas, as were many others in his cabinet, but Defense Minister Moshe Dayan was adamant. First and foremost, he was unwilling for the IDF to fight on multiple fronts at the same time but a major concern was his fear of Soviet intervention on behalf of the Syrians. It was one thing to fight Arab armies but quite another to face a superpower. Furthermore, aircraft serviceability was suffering after four days of intensive warfare, ammunition stocks were depleted and the cost of assaulting such formidable defences was likely to be high. As Dayan acidly remarked in cabinet: 'How much more Arab land do we need?' He was highly suspicious of the settlers whom he believed just wanted the prime agricultural land of the Golan for their own farms. As in so many aspects of the war, he was to be proved absolutely right.

Eshkol was perplexed by his Minister of Defense and deeply concerned for the settlers in the north. This was exacerbated by a telephone call on Thursday afternoon from their spokesman, Haim Ber, who shouted in desperation, 'We're being shelled non-stop! We demand that the government free us from this nightmare!' The pressure on the prime minister intensified when Miriam Eshkol told her husband, 'I have a birthday coming up and I want the Banias.' As the headwaters of the Jordan River were situated in Banias, it was the ultimate prize in the war for water. Throughout the day, the air force bombarded the Golan Heights in an attempt to silence the guns firing on the Galilee Finger and a lull ensued as the Syrian Government considered its position, since both





TOP
The inhabitants of Tiberias cheer and wave as AFVs deploy to the Golan Heights in order to remove the threat of Syrian guns bombarding the town.

BOTTOM
Both before and during the war, Prime Minister Levi Eshkol came under intense pressure from the settlers in Upper Galilee to undertake military action against Syria to the extent that representatives were invited to present their case before the Israeli cabinet. Their pleas were finally answered with the launch of Operation *Hammer* on 9 June.

Egypt and Jordan had now agreed to a ceasefire. It seemed as if the four-day war was over. At 1910hrs on the Thursday evening, Levi Eshkol convened the Ministerial Defense Committee to try once more to overcome Dayan's objections. He even allowed representatives of the settlers' lobby to address the ministers. The arguments were prolonged and acrimonious but the Minister of Defense remained implacable and announced dismissively, 'In military matters, I'm against making decisions on the basis of majority decisions.' There was to be no attack on the Golan Heights. Exhausted after four days of war, both Prime Minister Eshkol and IDF Chief of Staff Rabin retired to bed and fell immediately into deep sleep. After days of fruitless pleading and persuasion, Dado Elazar finally conceded defeat and went to bed at 0200hrs. Dayan remained in the Pit deep underground at the Kyria and brooded through the night, poring over the latest intelligence reports.

After its gruelling road march of over 350km from the Sinai to Kfar Szold in the Huleh Valley, Colonel Albert Mendler's 8th Armored Brigade comprised two under-strength battalions with just 33 serviceable M50 and





LEFT
A column of trucks climbs on to the Golan Plateau in the Gonen area the wake of the 37th Armored Brigade that achieved the breakthrough on the central sector of the Golan Heights.

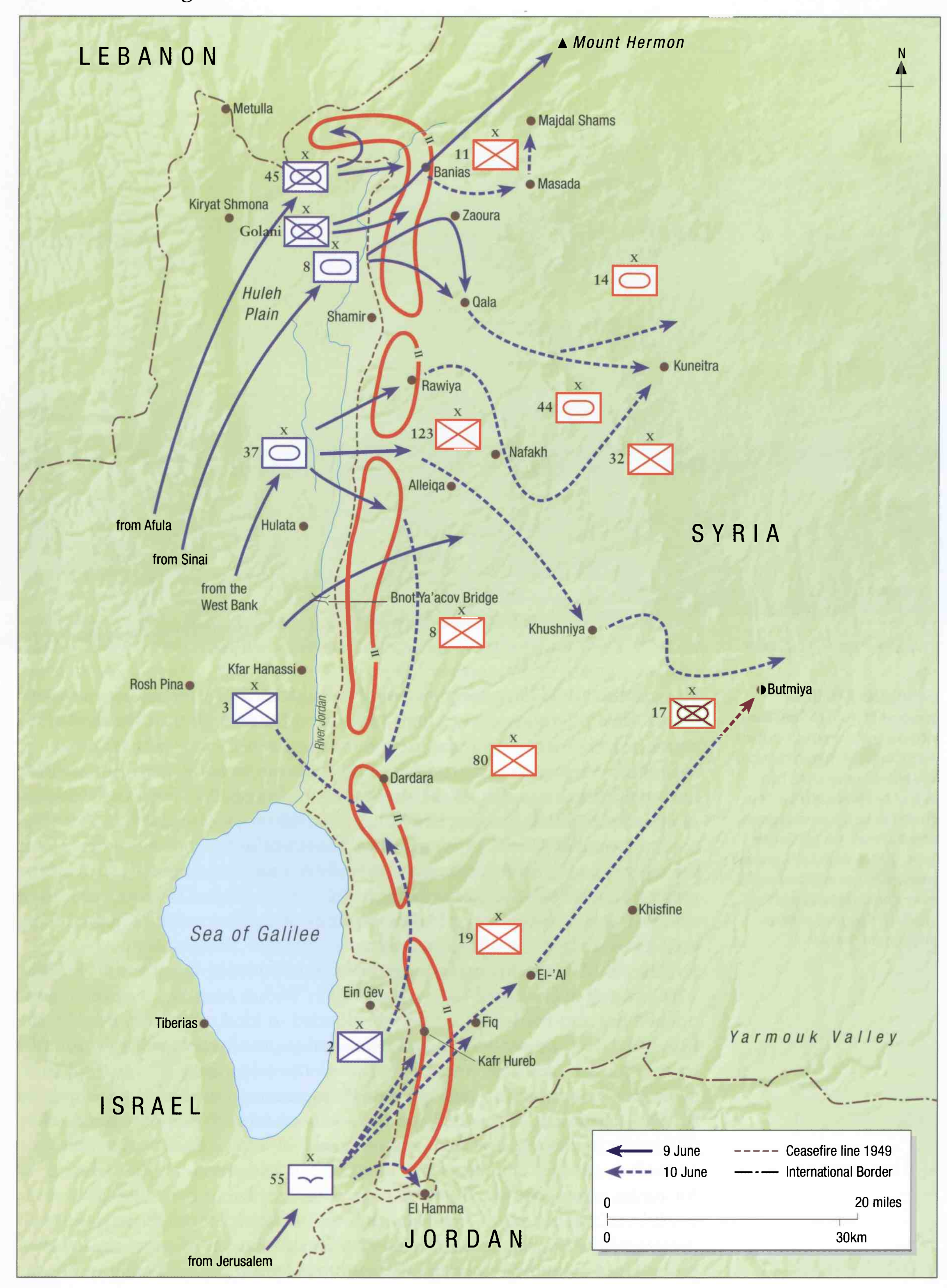
RIGHT
Typical of the Syrian fortified positions on the Golan escarpment was Amrat Az Adin that overlooked Kibbutz Ha'on on the Sea of Galilee. These bunkers featured specially designed concrete lips above the weapon slits, as well as runaway channels to counter napalm attack from the air.

M51 Shermans. Most of his officers were not familiar with the terrain over which they were to attack nor was there time to familiarize them. However, the brigade was reinforced by a Sherman company from the 37th Armored Brigade (Col. Uri Ram), which had been fighting the Jordanians on the West Bank, as had the 45th Armored Brigade (Col. Moshe Bar-Kochva). All three armoured brigades were now in the process of moving to new assembly areas and preparing themselves for action. The infantry component of Northern Command comprised the elite 1st Golani Infantry Brigade under the command of Colonel Yonah Efrat; the 2nd Infantry Brigade (Colonel Avnon) south of the Sea of Galilee and the 3rd Infantry Brigade (Colonel Emanuel Shehed) in the area of the Bnot Ya'acov Bridge. There was an additional infantry formation facing Lebanon. Finally, the 55th Paratroop Brigade (Col. Motta Gur) was redeployed from Central Command after its titanic battles in the capture of Jerusalem, as was the 80th Paratroop Brigade (Colonel Dani Matt) from the Sinai to act as a general reserve. However, these deployments took time, even with Israel's short internal lines of communication, and the units needed to rest and reorganize before entering action. The officer in charge of Northern Command was the pugnacious Brig. Gen. David 'Dado' Elazar. He was desperate for a confrontation with the Syrians now that the Egyptians and the Jordanians had been defeated, but thus far Gen. Moshe Dayan was categorically opposed to any military action against Syria.

THE HAMMER FALLS

At 0600hrs on Friday, 9 June, Brig. Gen. Dado Elazar was woken by a telephone call. The message was cryptic in the extreme,'Can you attack?' Somewhat bemused, Elazar replied, 'Yes I can and right now.' 'Then attack' came the response. Moshe Dayan had changed his mind. Without even informing Eshkol or Rabin, he ordered Northern Command to undertake Operation *Hammer* against Syria. It was a remarkable volte-face based on numerous intelligence reports and intercepted diplomatic signals between Cairo and Damascus that he perused during the long reaches of the night. The critical factor had been the Egyptian agreement to a ceasefire that started at 0445hrs local time or 2145hrs at the UN in New York, together with the pressure from President Nasser on his Syrian counterpart, Hafez al-Assad, to accept the ceasefire as well. It was now or never. But Operation *Hammer* had been devised as a night attack. It was deemed dangerous enough in darkness but in daylight

The Golan Heights





Sud Vautour IIA fighter-bombers of No. 110 Squadron are prepared for action. Armed with four DEFA 30mm cannons and able to carry some two tons of ordnance, the Vautour proved to be a potent ground-attack aircraft. On the Syrian front, the IAF flew 1,077 ground attack missions and dropped more bombs in two days than on all the Egyptian airbases throughout the war.

an assault on the Golan Heights would be suicidal. Nevertheless, there was no choice. The offensive was set for 1130hrs to give enough time for the IAF to continue its bombardment and for combat engineers to clear paths through the enemy minefields, after creating lines through the Israeli defensive minefields during the previous night. Wave after wave of Mirages, Mystères and Vautours pounded the Golan Plateau, dropping some 400 tons of ordnance, including rockets captured from Egyptian stocks. Meanwhile, the engineers went about their dangerous tasks. Fortunately, the winter rains had exposed many of the mines and the Syrians had not bothered to replace them. Despite the roads of northern Israel being clogged with hundreds of military vehicles approaching the Galilee Finger, the offensive began on schedule.

The 8th Armored Brigade moved out of its forming-up position (FUP) at 1100hrs and approached the Syrian border. Within minutes, the Syrian guns opened fire and the Israeli artillery responded in kind, ably supported by the IAF. Much to the dismay of their Soviet advisers, the Syrian artillery continued to bombard Israeli settlements instead of the advancing troops. Eight un-armoured bulldozers driven by combat engineers spearheaded the climb up to the escarpment. They became the focus of intensive Syrian fire as they diligently improved the precipitous track. When a driver was killed or wounded, another engineer leapt into the cab and continued the advance as the tanks scrambled up the track behind them. Five of the bulldozers never made it to the top but a breakthrough was achieved through the re-entrant between Tel Azzaziat and Givat Ha'em. The leading tanks were now in open ground and soon they overran an abandoned Syrian position at Gur el Askar



The armoured assault up the Golan escarpment was spearheaded by eight unarmoured bulldozers. They became the focus of intense Syrian fire and five were knocked out, while many more drivers were either killed or wounded during this dangerous mission.

and advanced down the supply road leading southwards. They then rushed the strongpoint at Na'amush with the tanks firing all the while with the Syrians fleeing from the post.

The original plan had been for the leading battlegroup to outflank the Qala position. However, heavy artillery fire made observation on the battlefield exceptionally difficult and the two leading companies both missed the turning and consequently struck the Qala position head-on. The Qala redoubt presented a formidable all-round position, with deep concrete bunkers, studded with anti-tank guns. Some six kilometres (four miles) to its north was another stronghold at Zaoura that dominated Qala. In order to approach the latter position, any attacker was forced to follow a narrow track that wound through the massive basalt rocks with little or no deviation possible because the track ran along the side of a steep gorge, several hundred metres deep. The entire approach was uphill and under full observation from both Qala and Zaoura. The last two kilometres (one mile) from Sir Adib were especially treacherous and in full view of the enemy guns. The commander of the leading tank battalion (the 129th), Lieutenant-Colonel Arye Biro, was badly wounded but continued to lead his tanks until he collapsed in his turret and had to be evacuated. A survivor of Auschwitz and former paratrooper who had transferred to armour, Arye Biro subsequently recalled the attack thus far from its outset:

> I didn't waste any time, knowing that we would all too soon come under heavy artillery fire. There was minimal cover to seek as we moved uphill and behind me I could see that long column of Shermans grinding upwards through the boulders. Here and there one or two were losing their tracks and stalling but the rest followed. It made me very proud to lead them into battle. Soon we had crossed the Syrian border.
>
> My orders were clear and very, very tough, I fully recognised the danger we were facing. Suddenly all hell was breaking lose around us. Artillery fire was exploding, crashing onto the basalt boulders, and sending a rain of deadly splinters into the open halftracks. I sent young Nati [Lieutenant Nataniel





LEFT
The tracks up the Golan escarpment were ill suited to heavy AFVs, so the lighter AMX-13 and Shermans were the preferred tanks in the initial assault. Here, a Sherman M50 negotiates a hairpin bend as the crew of an AMX-13 repair their vehicle, which has shed a track.

RIGHT
Sherman M50 tanks manoeuvre past an AMX-13 Light Tank on the Golan escarpment. Of note, both the AMX-13 and the M50 share the same 75mm main armament derived from the German 7.5cm KwK 42 L/70 as used in the famed Panther tank.

> Horowitz], commanding A Company to take the lead, whilst I followed closely behind. We passed the border minefield, which had been cleared by the engineers and took the patrol road which seemed good enough for speedy travel, at least for some of the way. 'So far so good' I thought as we quickly took the first Syrian position – a relatively weak outpost at Gur el Askar – with Nati's tanks firing a few HE rounds. However, I had no illusions as to what lay in store.

Lieutenant Horowitz's company raced through the Syrian outpost, then pushed on to the next obstacle at Na'amush which proved a tougher nut to crack. Just before reaching Na'amush, Captain Ilan's company should have overtaken Horowitz's and stormed the Syrian position, but he was delayed as some of his tanks had shed their tracks. Lieutenant Horowitz decided to act on his own initiative as he recalls:

> I looked behind me and saw some of my tanks following me in good shape. My advance was now in full swing so I saw no reason to delay. In fact I then realised that I had actually broken through the Na'amush position! One of my tanks had destroyed an anti-tank gun at 400 metres range and had gone on through. But the joy was short-lived. Just as we passed the enemy position we came under heavy fire from another post blocking the track, which I identified as Ukda. We were in single file with only one tank able to return fire, no way round and no cover. I decided to take it on and hope for the best.

However, after Na'amush, Col. Biro's battalion hit more trouble. It should have turned left onto a track which would bring them onto the road beside the TAP (Trans Arabian Pipeline) carrying oil from Saudi Arabia through Syria to the Mediterranean Sea. This road led straight to Zaoura, their final objective. Half of Horowitz's company was still held up in front of Ukda, whilst those following him up faced another problem – two tracks instead of just one at the junction. Unfortunately, they chose the wrong one as Horowitz recalls:

> The Colonel then ordered me to bypass the Ukda position, traverse all my guns onto it and fire as fast as we could as we sped safely through. Having got through without loss, we came upon yet another Syrian position, which was pitted with dug-in antitank guns and German Wehrmacht-era Panzer Kpfw IV armed with the long barrelled 7.5cm guns, also dug-in, they were

formidable weapons. Much heavy fire also came from the Zaoura position some distance further on. Colonel Biro came on the radio telling me to knock out the tanks first and that he would ask for artillery support for me as I pressed on. However, I suddenly realised to my shock that I was actually storming Sir Adib, which we had been trying to avoid! But I was now fully engaged and had no choice but to continue my assault. I tried to contact the colonel, but there was no reply as his radio was out with the antennae having been shot off. I then noted that some of the enemy anti-tank guns were strangely quiet – they turned out to be dummies!

At that moment, Col. Biro was wounded by shell splinters in his face. His signals officer enquired about his wellbeing but Biro retorted, 'Stalin and Hitler couldn't do me in, do you think that the Syrians can?' But he was soon to be proved wrong as the signals officer, Captain Yuval Ben-Arzi, takes up the story:

We were fighting in the middle of Sir Adib, throwing hand grenades into the enemy trenches as we passed. All over the place frightened Syrian soldiers were rushing about in panic as the tanks passed. Just in front of us about two kilometres away, half of Nati's company had already passed Sir Adib and was on the slope leading to a formidable stronghold looming up ahead. We thought it to be Zaoura but Nati radioed that he believed it to be Qala. As I studied the map down in the turret a burst of machine-gun fire hit our turret and wounded the colonel in the face. He slumped down in the turret, badly wounded but still just conscious. He ordered me to contact Nati and tell him to storm Qala with all his might. But there was no answer from Nati – his radio was out – a shell having blown off the entire commander's hatch and wounded him in the head. The colonel was also in bad shape and had to be evacuated.



A Piper PA18 Super Cub liaison aircraft acting in the aerial observation role sweeps low over an armoured column during the advance over the Golan Plateau.





LEFT
A light machine-gun team covers the advance of paratroopers into the village of Banias on 10 June 1967. The headwaters of the Jordan River are situated in Banias and it was this above all else that the wife of Prime Minister Levi Eshkol wanted as a birthday present in the days before the war began.

RIGHT
A Sherman M50 comes under fire during the battle for the Golan Heights. The IDF lost 160 tanks or almost a third of those committed during the Syrian campaign although many of those were recovered and repaired.

The battalion reconnaissance officer, Major Rafael Mokady, was nearby and saw what had happened to Col. Biro. He immediately took command and climbed into the tank. The major wanted to keep to the original plan and tried to stop Horowitz's attack on Qala but he could not reach Horowitz because his head wound was bleeding so profusely that the blood had shorted the radio intercom in his helmet. Indeed, the complete battlegroup was now engaged in a violent battle with little room to manoeuvre. It lasted for three hours. The entire hillside was soon engulfed in flames from blazing tanks and exploding ammunition dumps, sending off clouds of thick black smoke that darkened the sky. The signals officer, Captain Ben-Arzi, picks up the story:

> The major [Rafael Mokady] was directing the tank towards a track that he had spotted. It was the right one leading towards the oil pipeline to Zaoura. Suddenly, our tank was hit by an armour piercing shell that struck the differential, then went on into the engine and struck the oil cooler which burst into flames. The motor went dead and the tank rolled to a stop. We were now a sitting target for any enemy anti-tank guns. And in seconds they began firing at us with deadly effect. With the gunner dead, Major Mokady took his place on the turret machine gun and fired it until he was hit and fell into the turret, dead. I took over the gun, but was also hit.

The battlegroup was now at crisis point, its commander evacuated, seriously wounded, the second in command, Major Mokady, dead and several other officers dead or wounded. Only the wounded Lt. Horowitz was still advancing. In the middle of the heated battle he finally received a radio message from the brigade commander telling him that he was to assume command of the remnants of the battalion. Lt. Horowitz relates:

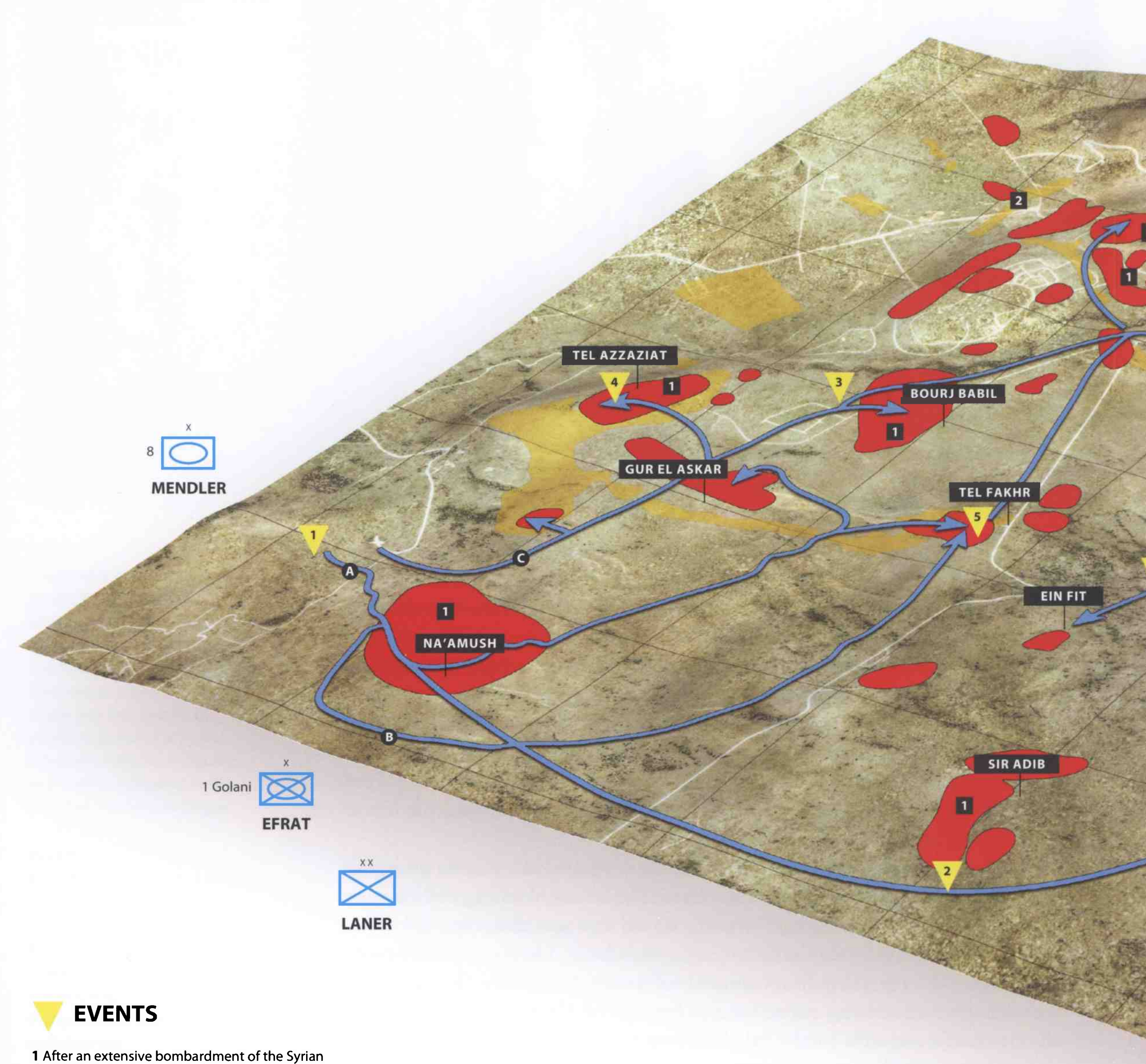
> I was obviously very frightened, not only had I lost so many of my tanks and men, but now I was to take over the battalion in the middle of a very fierce battle for the Qala fortress. I could see its formidable position, looming high up in the basalt mountains, with its mass of concrete bunkers and dug-in tanks.



An AMX-13 tank moves through the streets of Tiberias on its way to the Golan Heights.

> I had taken over just twenty tanks in all, some of which were already damaged. I first decided to change tanks and so took over one belonging to one of the platoon commanders that had better working radios. I measured the distance to the Qala fortress to be some 1,800 metres, with a narrow approach road snaking between the black basalt boulders, allowing for no dispersal, so it had to be a frontal attack yet again, this time hopefully, with air strikes, or at least, artillery support. I decided to contact Colonel Mendler who had already told me of my assignment. He then tried to reassure me that he was leading a complete tank battalion and was aiming to attack Qala from its rear. That sounded fine to me, however, it was of little help at that moment, as I was approaching the fortress from its strongest side.
>
> We came up to an outer layer of 'Dragon's teeth' [a concrete anti-tank obstacle] that blocked the road when I saw Ilan's tank skidding off the road and falling into a valley below. The entire battle area was now engulfed in fire and smoke, with shells and bullets flying everywhere. Here and there I could see another of my dwindling number of tanks being hit, the surviving crewmembers scrambling out to try and find cover. Over the radio I ordered all fit tanks to assemble for a final charge on the fortress. To my great relief I also saw Ilan, who had miraculously survived, lead his tank in the charge, only to be hit yet again, his tank bursting into flames. But he had nine lives and he jumped down, put out the flames licking around his coverall, then jumped back into his burning tank! I watched as he then traversed the gun, fired a shot which destroyed the enemy anti-tank gun which had hit him. Then, badly wounded, he sought cover in the boulders, ducking from enemy bullets. And he survived!

One by one Horowitz's tanks were hit as they approached the Qala redoubt. In the end he entered the enemy stronghold with just two other tanks and captured the position. For a moment he was safe, or so it seemed, but then word came that a Syrian tank column was moving down the road from the north. It was a desperate situation that he now faced. Fortunately, at the very last moment when all seemed lost, Col. Mendler's vanguard appeared and



EVENTS

1 After an extensive bombardment of the Syrian defences on the Golan Heights with artillery and air attack by the IAF, two battlegroups of 8th Armored Brigade cross the border at 1130hrs and climb the Golan escarpment under heavy fire, followed two hours later by a battlegroup of the 1st Golani Infantry Brigade.

2 The battlegroup based on the 129th Tank Battalion faces fierce opposition at Sir Adib and Qala, suffering serious casualties including its commanding officer, Lt. Col. Ayre Biro and second in command.

3 The second battlegroup of the 8th Armored Brigade attacks north eastwards to capture Banias and the headwaters of the Banias River that feeds the Jordan River inside Israel.

4 A company of Golani infantry of the 51st Battalion and a company of M50 Shermans of 8th Armored Brigade assault the Syrian stronghold of Tel Azzaziat from the rear.

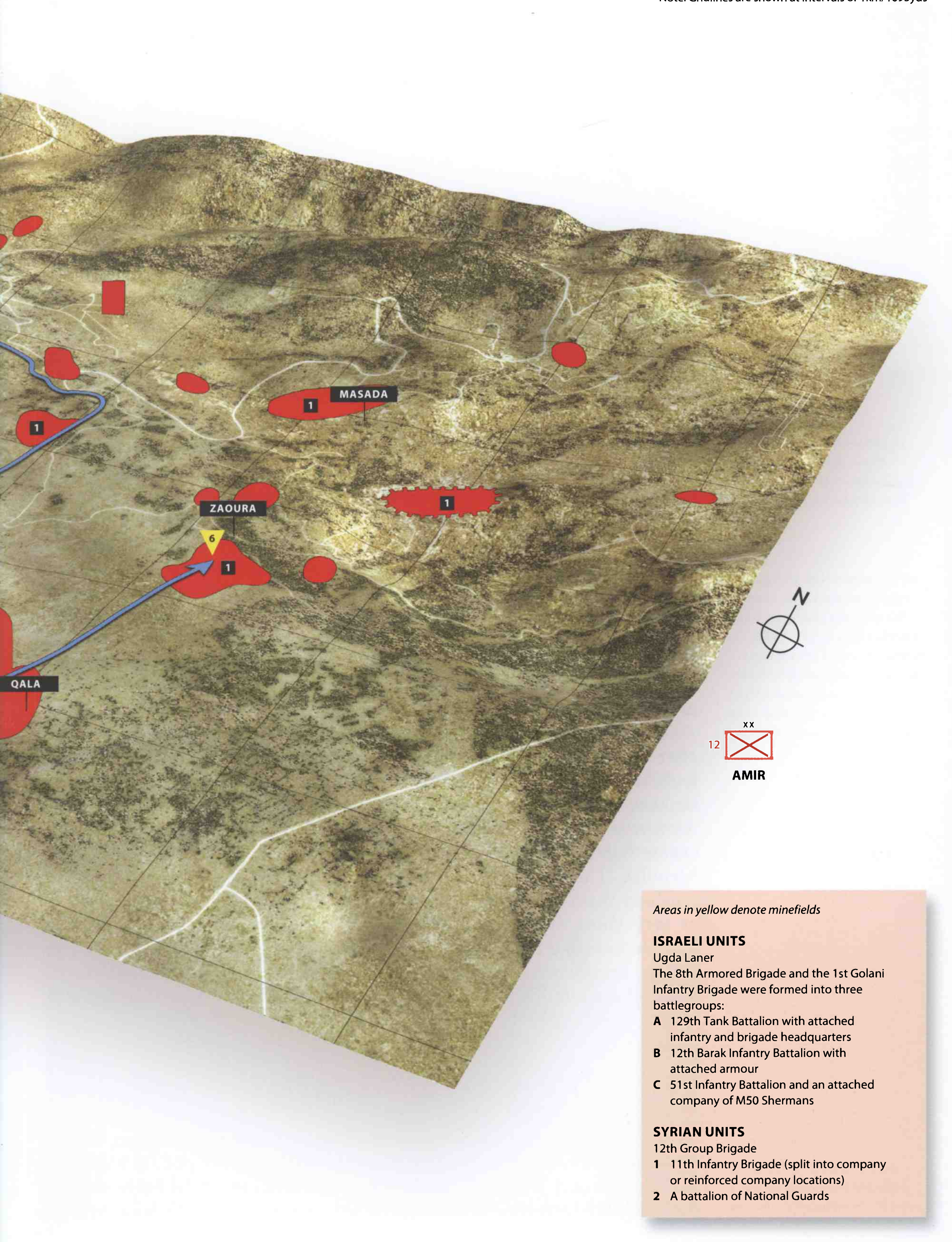
5 At 1530hrs, the 12th Barak Battalion of the Golani Brigade assaults the Syrian stronghold of Tel Fakhr suffering serious casualties before capturing the position by dusk, causing the Syrian first defensive line of the 11th Infantry Brigade to collapse and a general retreat ensues.

6 1600hrs: after heavy fighting the final objective of the first day, Zaoura, is captured by a small force of tanks of the 129th Tank Battalion under the command of Lt. Nataniel Horowitz.

7 Overnight, the battlegroups rest and reorganize before continuing the offensive on 10 June, the final day of the Six Day War, with the capture of Kuneitra.

THE BREAK-IN BATTLE

The initial assault on the Golan Heights, 9 June 1967


Note: Gridlines are shown at intervals of 1km/1093yds
MASADA
ZAOURA
QALA
1
6
N
XX
12
AMIR
Areas in yellow denote minefields
ISRAELI UNITS
Ugda Laner
The 8th Armored Brigade and the 1st Golani Infantry Brigade were formed into three battlegroups:
A 129th Tank Battalion with attached infantry and brigade headquarters
B 12th Barak Infantry Battalion with attached armour
C 51st Infantry Battalion and an attached company of M50 Shermans
SYRIAN UNITS
12th Group Brigade
1 11th Infantry Brigade (split into company or reinforced company locations)
2 A battalion of National Guards

Once the Golan escarpment was captured on the first day of the Syrian campaign, the IDF encountered more open ground and the enemy in full retreat.



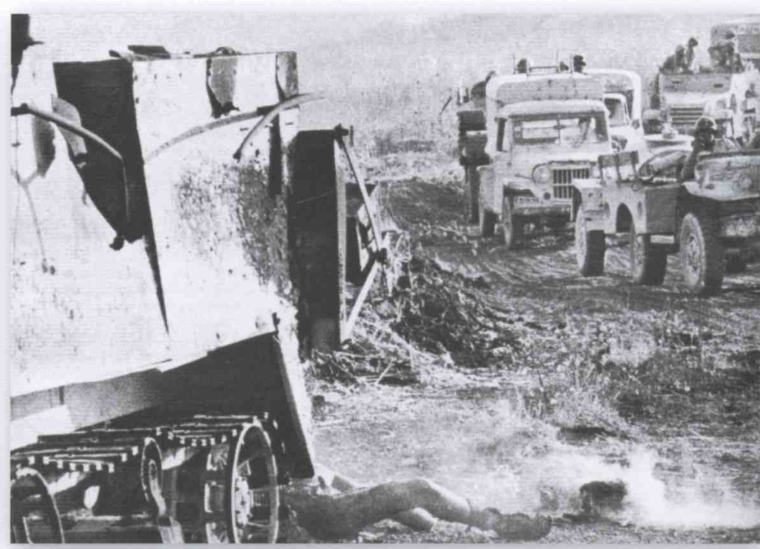
saved the day. After the war, Lt. Nataniel 'Nati' Horowitz was awarded the Medal of Valor and later rose to senior rank in the IDF. The commander of one of the other two tanks that stormed Qala was Sergeant Shaul Vardi. Having destroyed several other fortified Syrian positions on the approaches to Qala, Vardi was wounded in the face when his tank was hit but not put out of action. He was unable to see for a while but when he recovered his sight he went on fighting. His tank was hit for a second time and this time knocked out. He and his crew managed to bail out. Armed only with Uzi sub-machine guns and hand grenades, Vardi led his crew to clear the Syrian positions as infantrymen. Only when the objective was captured did he allow himself to be evacuated to hospital. He was the fourth soldier to be awarded the Medal of Valor for actions on the Golan Heights: a clear indication of the severity of the fighting against a tenacious enemy.

By 1600hrs, Zaoura was captured followed by Qala some two hours later after a series of air strikes finally forced the remaining Syrian tanks to withdraw. It had been a hard day's pounding. The brigade had lost half its tanks to enemy fire or breakdown but it had succeeded in breaking through the first two defence lines after a gruelling uphill battle against a determined enemy fighting from well-prepared positions. In the words of Col. Albert Mendler, 'The Syrians fought well and bloodied us. We beat them only by crushing them under our treads and by blasting them with our cannons at very short range from 100 to 500 metres.' In the fading light, the brigade formed a battle line against a possible counterattack. It never came and the brigade was able to reorganize and replenish its supplies unhindered. The 8th Armored Brigade was now lodged on the Golan escarpment and ready to exploit its success on the following day.

TEL FAKHR AND TEL AZZAZIAT

Some two hours after the 8th Armored Brigade began the offensive, the 1st Golani Infantry Brigade crossed the border in much the same place as Mendler's brigade to launch its assault on the formidable redoubts of Tel Fakhr and Tel Azzaziat. Whereas Mendler's tanks turned southwards, the Golanis went to





the north. The plan was to attack the two positions simultaneously from the rear since a frontal assault in daylight was out of the question. The route chosen was along the supply road to each fortress since it was presumed these would not be blocked or mined. The heavily fortified position at Tel Azzaziat was on an isolated knoll some 137m above the border from where the four dug-in PzKpfw IV tanks constantly harassed Israeli farmers on the plain below. A company of Shermans from the 8th and a company of infantry of the 51st Battalion in half-tracks undertook the attack. By skilful fire and movement and the indirect approach, they overwhelmed the position in short order.

The attack on Tel Fakhr by the 12th Barak Battalion did not fare so well. The horseshoe-shaped fortress was some five kilometres inland from the border, but multiple guns, as well as extensive minefields and barbed-wire entanglements, covered every approach. Despite hours of aerial bombardment, the position remained largely intact. Tragically, the leading infantry company in their half-tracks lost its way and, instead of approaching from the rear, entered the horseshoe where the Syrian defences were strongest. Corporal Yisrael Huberman and Private Moshe Drimmer both belonged to a group of nine combat engineers whose job was to remove mines in front of the tanks. A few hundred metres from Tel Fakhr they came under heavy fire from the

LEFT
Armed with FN rifles and Uzi sub-machine guns, Israeli paratroopers storm the village of Banias in the final hours of the war.

RIGHT
The fighting in the opening 24 hours of the Syrian campaign was intense and costly in IDF casualties. The Israelis suffered 141 dead in 31 hours of combat while the Syrians lost some 500, 2,500 wounded and 578 were taken prisoner including, it is believed, some Soviet advisers.



Syrian soldiers surrender to Israeli tanks as the campaign nears its conclusion on 10 June.







COMBINED ASSAULT GOLAN HEIGHTS, 10 JUNE 1967 (pp. 80–81)

The main thrust of the IDF offensive against Syria was conducted in the far north by the 8th Armored Brigade. A subsidiary attack was made by the 3rd Reserve Infantry Division under the command of Col. Emanuel Shehed, with attached armour, in the Mishmar Ha Harden area, one of the DMZs, on 9 June. As Syrian resistance was slight following the start of their withdrawal in the late afternoon, the Israelis reinforced success with the commitment of the 37th Armored Brigade under the command of Col. Uri Ram that had just been redeployed from the Judaean sector of the Jordanian campaign. The brigade began its assault along a winding mountain track up Golan escarpment at nightfall from the vicinity of Gonen. Opposition was largely ineffective and the brigade soon captured its first objective, Jelabina, followed by the village of Rawiya on the TAP line road. Now that it was established on the Golan Heights, the brigade rested and regrouped prior to the continuation of the offensive as soon as daylight arrived. The exploitation phase was a two-pronged advance to the north-eastwards to Kuneitra to join up with the Golani Brigade and the 8th Armored Brigade and south-eastwards to Butmiya to link up with the paratroopers of the 55th Paratroop Brigade. This was to be the culmination of Operation *Pincers* and the capture of the complete Golan Plateau. By daybreak, Syrian resistance had cracked compounded by conflicting orders from Damascus whether to fight or withdraw. In the event, the Syrian Army broke and ran, hotly pursued by the IDF as shown here as the AMX-13 tank company (**1**) of the 37th Armored Brigade accompanied by mechanized infantry in M3 half-tracks (**2**) advance towards Butmiya against little opposition except sporadic Syrian artillery fire trying to engage the advancing concentrations of Israeli tanks and troops.

Syrians just as Huberman managed to fire a round from a 120mm mortar mounted in the half-track. The vehicle was then hit and burst into flames. Huberman tried to free the wounded but he himself caught fire. He had to be pulled away by his comrades who ripped off his burning uniform. Acting as the vehicle machine-gunner, Drimmer coolly turned his weapon on to the Syrian positions and gave covering fire to the exposed crew, long enough for them to gain shelter. He went on firing inside the burning vehicle and, despite his severe wounds, continued engaging the enemy until the half-track was hit again and exploded. Drimmer was posthumously awarded the Medal of Valor.

One by one the nine Sherman tanks and 19 half-tracks were disabled by gunfire or mines, forcing the survivors to dismount. The infantry immediately came under heavy fire as they charged towards the barbed-wire entanglements. The battalion commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Moshe 'Musa' Klein, ordered the 25 Golanis that had survived the initial Syrian fire to attack the position from two directions – some heading for the southern part and the rest towards the northern position, which lay beyond a gorge. The southern position was particularly strong and was defended by a company of the 187th Infantry Battalion under the command of Captain Ahmad Ibrahim Khalili. There were



A 76mm-armed M1 Sherman enters a Syrian Army military camp near Kuneitra in the final hours of the war. The honour of entering the town of Kuneitra itself fell to the 1st Golani Infantry Brigade that had defended the northern borders of Israel for almost 20 years.







HELICOPTER COMBAT ASSAULT FROM FIQ TO BUTMIYA, 10 JUNE 1967 (pp. 84–85)

The 55th Paratroop Brigade was scheduled to make a combat assault to capture the airbase at El Arish on the opening day of the war but this was cancelled owing to the rapid advance of Ugda Tal along the northern coastal road of the Sinai. Instead the 55th Paratroop Brigade was reassigned to Central Command for the capture of Jerusalem. After the success of this campaign, the 55th was reassigned once more on 7 June to Northern Command where it fought on the central sector. One battalion was kept in reserve to the south of the Sea of Galilee. On the final day of the war, 10 June, it was committed to action in an innovative manner in a series of daring raids as the IDF ruthlessly exploited its early successes in the offensive against Syria. It was vital to capture as much of the Golan Plateau as possible before any ceasefire was imposed by the UN. Paratroopers and their equipment were transported in three Aerospatiale Super Frelon heavy lift helicopters (**1**) of No. 114 Squadron. The IDF had just four Super Frelons in June 1967; the other remained in the Sinai for Search and Rescue duties for downed pilots of the IAF. Known in the IDF as T'zura or Hornet which is the meaning of Frelon in French, the Super Frelon was capable of carrying two jeeps or 25 troops. The helicopter is shown here depositing an M38A1C jeep (**2**) mounting an M40 1106mm Recoilless Rifle that provided an anti-armour capability to the paratroopers. Twenty jeeps were deployed on the operation. Meanwhile, more paratroopers are being landed from 15 S-58 helicopters (**3**) of No. 124 Squadron during the rapid advance from Fiq to Butmiya. The battalion reached the objective just before the ceasefire after a series of landings over a distance of some 100km (60 miles).

three barbed-wire fences between the attackers and the enemy bunkers. One of the soldiers, Private David Shirazi, was part of an assault detachment that had climbed up the 100m (330ft) slope under fire from Syrian mortars and machine guns to reach the barbed-wire fencing around one of the strongpoints. Using wire-cutters would have taken too long under such withering enemy fire, so Shirazi rushed forward and flung himself across the wire and told his comrades to use his body as a bridge. When they had all got through, he extricated himself from the barbed wire and ran after them into the enemy positions, clearing them in bitter hand-to-hand fighting. When the machine-gunner fell wounded, Shirazi picked up his weapon and pressed home the attack until he was killed a few minutes later. He was subsequently awarded the Medal of Valor for his gallantry.

For three hours the battle for Tel Fakhr raged in ferocious hand-to-hand fighting with fists, knives, teeth and rifle butts. Of the 13 Golanis that attacked the northern position, ten became casualties while on the southern flank only one of the 12 attackers emerged unscathed. He was Corporal Yitzhak Hamawi who recounts the final assault:

> We ran, Musa [Klein] and I through the trenches. Whenever a helmet popped up, we couldn't tell it was one of ours or not. Suddenly in front of us stood a soldier whom we couldn't identify. The battalion commander shouted the password and when the soldier didn't answer, he fired a burst at him but missed. We jumped out of the trench, ran five metres and then Musa fell on his face ... killed by the Syrian soldier he'd missed. Our radioman waited for him to leap up again, then shot him.'

The Israelis lost 31 killed and 82 wounded in the assault while 62 Syrians died and 20 were taken prisoner.

ENDGAME

By the evening of 9 June, the IDF had achieved the initial objectives of Operation *Hammer*, albeit with heavy casualties, but much of the formidable Syrian defences still remained intact. During the night, Israeli reinforcements poured on to the Golan including the 45th Armored Brigade in the northern sector while the 37th Armored Brigade bolstered the Israeli forces in the centre. The 80th Paratroop Brigade had redeployed from the Sinai, whose capture had been completed that day, and was now ready for action. The Israelis used the night of 9/10 June to regroup and resupply its forces spread out along the Golan escarpment. At the same time, the Syrian Government was making desperate pleas to its Arab brothers for military support. Having failed to provide any forces to its allies during the first days of the war, it was hardly surprising that no assistance was forthcoming. With the news that President Nasser had resigned following the ceasefire in the Sinai, the Syrians realized that they now stood alone against a powerful and vengeful IDF. The most important matter now was to save the Ba'athist regime. Many key officials fled the country. At 0845hrs, the forces on the Golan Plateau were ordered to withdraw in order to protect the capital of Damascus. This caused the Syrian forces to begin a chaotic, headlong retreat pursued by the Israelis. Colonel Mendler's 8th Armored Brigade entered a deserted Kuneitra at 1430hrs and found the city strewn with abandoned military equipment. One of the Israeli



The Chief Rabbi of the IDF, Rabbi Shlomo Goren, blows the *shofar* or ram's horn in celebration of the capture of the Western Wall with the Torah tucked under his left arm.

commanders recalled: 'We arrived almost without hindrance at the gates of Kuneitra. ... All around us there were huge quantities of booty. Everything was in working order. Tanks still had their engines running, communications equipment was still in operation and had been abandoned. We captured Kuneitra without a fight.'

Saturday, 10 June, was a day of deep penetration by the Israelis into the heart of the enemy's defences and the clearance of all remaining resistance on the Golan Heights. The Syrians were totally incapable of stopping the Israeli advance so they appealed to the Soviet Union delegation at the United Nations to use their influence to call for an immediate ceasefire and to stop the war before Damascus came within range of Israeli guns. Perversely, the Soviets' demands to punish Israel for starting the war delayed its ending by several hours – precious time that allowed the IDF to continue its advance. The IDF rapidly modified its plans. Operation *Hammer* now became Operation *Pincers* for the conquest of the complete Golan Plateau. The ceasefire was set for 1400hrs local time but Gen. Moshe Dayan skilfully persuaded the UN representative on the ground, General Odd Bull, to delay the ceasefire until 1830hrs to allow the IDF sufficient time to complete the operation.

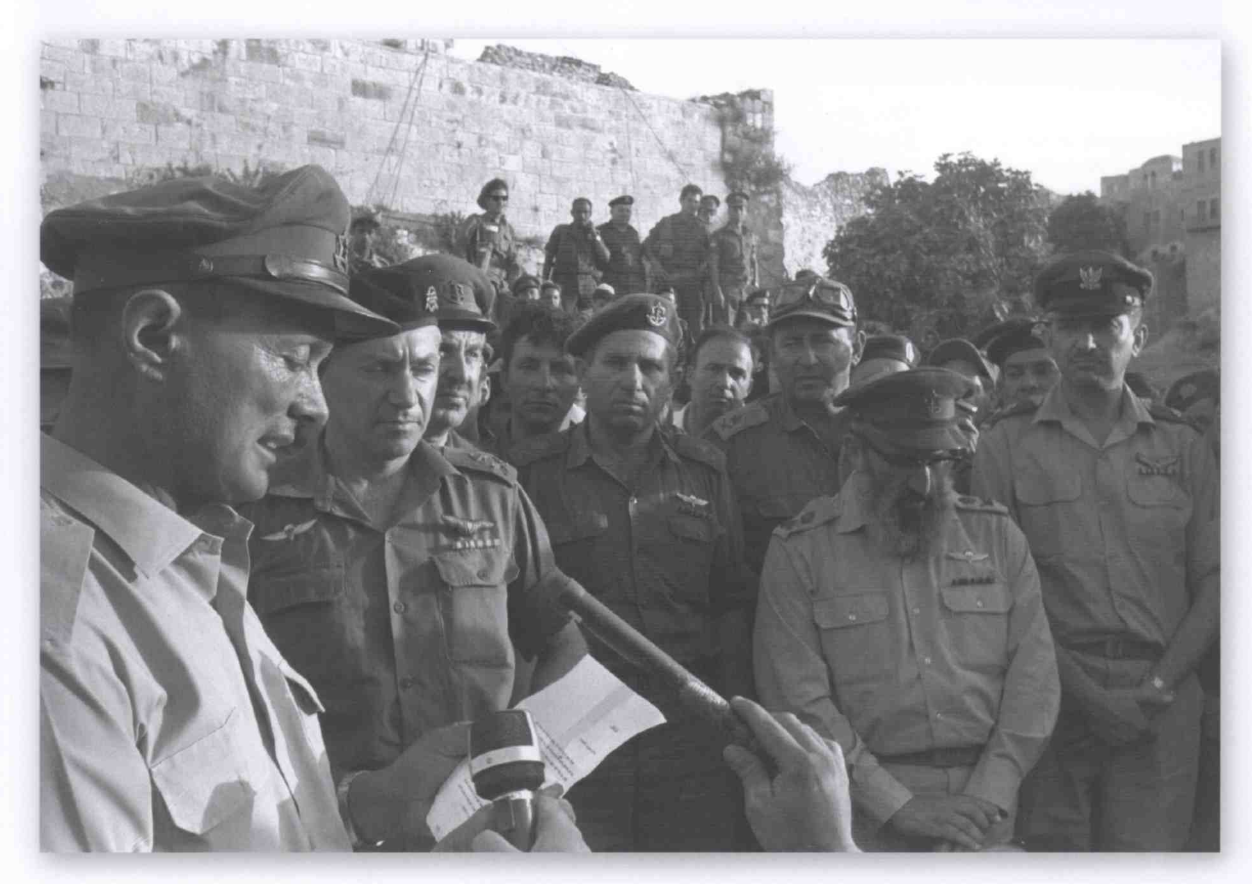
On the central sector, the 37th Armored Brigade and the 3rd Infantry Brigade advanced south-east and north-east, fanning out across the Golan as far as Kuneitra and Butmiya where they linked up with the paratroopers of the 55th Paratroop Brigade that had made a series of daring heliborne landings during the afternoon. In a matter of hours, paratroopers advanced almost 100km against a bemused and dispirited enemy. As one paratrooper recalled of the initial air assault, 'The flight took six minutes. It was a beautiful trip. All that was missing was an air hostess. We passed over a Syrian anti-aircraft gun manned by four soldiers. They didn't fire a shot. You won't find anything like this except in an Arab army. We landed in a wheat field and finished them off.' The helicopters then leapfrogged to the next objective until they arrived at Butmiya just before the ceasefire came into effect. The seemingly impregnable Golan Heights had fallen to the IDF in just 31 hours. In the words of Col. David Eshel, the IDF historian, 'As the smoke subsided, thousands of Galilee settlers, climbed out of their shelters. For the first time in nearly 20 years they could look up at the Golan Heights with pride instead of fear.' The Six Day War was over and on the seventh day, the IDF rested.

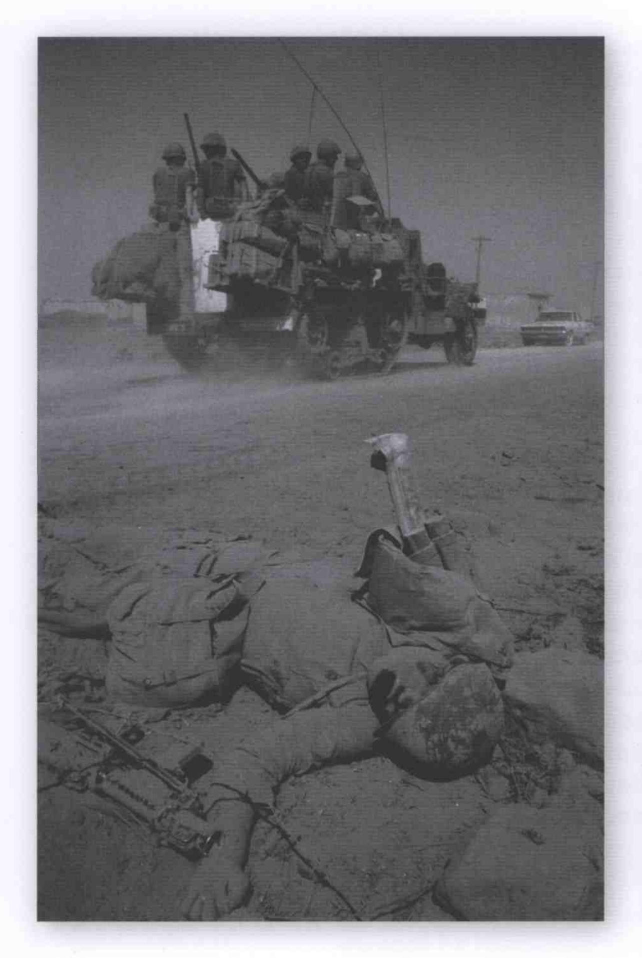
Israeli casualties in the capture of the Golan Heights were 127 dead and 625 wounded with four pilots captured. It had been a hard fight at a cost of almost 160 tanks knocked out, as against 122 in Sinai and 112 in Jordan. Two days later, on 12 June, Gen. Moshe Dayan authorized a final heliborne operation to occupy a key feature on the Mount Hermon ridgeline and the Druze village of Majdal Shams. The one-eyed warrior claimed that the peak was vital 'to further the science of astronomy in Israel'. By coincidence, it also allowed uninterrupted observation over the expanse of the Golan Heights and far across the Damascus Plain. It was a remarkable victory, thanks largely to the IAF and the stunning success of Operation *Moked*. In just six days, the armed forces of three countries had been destroyed and their leaders humiliated by Israel. As one IDF paratrooper stated, 'This is an interesting country. There's never a dull moment. You have a war. In six days it's over and you have turned the whole world upside down.'

AFTERMATH

With the Western Wall in the background, Minister of Defense Moshe Dayan issues his order of the day, during which he affirmed: 'We have returned to our holiest of holy places, never to be parted from it again.' For Israel, six days of military triumph have not produced a lasting peace and the region remains as volatile as ever.

The world was indeed turned upside down. For Gamal Abdel Nasser, the June War was a disaster from which he never recovered. His dreams of a pan-Arab Middle East under his domain were shattered. The leadership of the Palestinian cause passed inexorably to Yasser Arafat and the PLO. For King Hussein, it was a disaster as he lost almost half his kingdom in the West Bank, with its prime agricultural land and important tourist revenues from the Biblical sites. For Hafez al-Assad and Syria, the loss of the Golan Plateau was a disaster and a humiliation. The country retreated into self-imposed isolation to re-equip its armed forces with yet another massive influx of Soviet weapons, as did Egypt. Both countries vowed to continue the struggle against Israel and recover the lands that they had lost in battle. For Israel, the Six







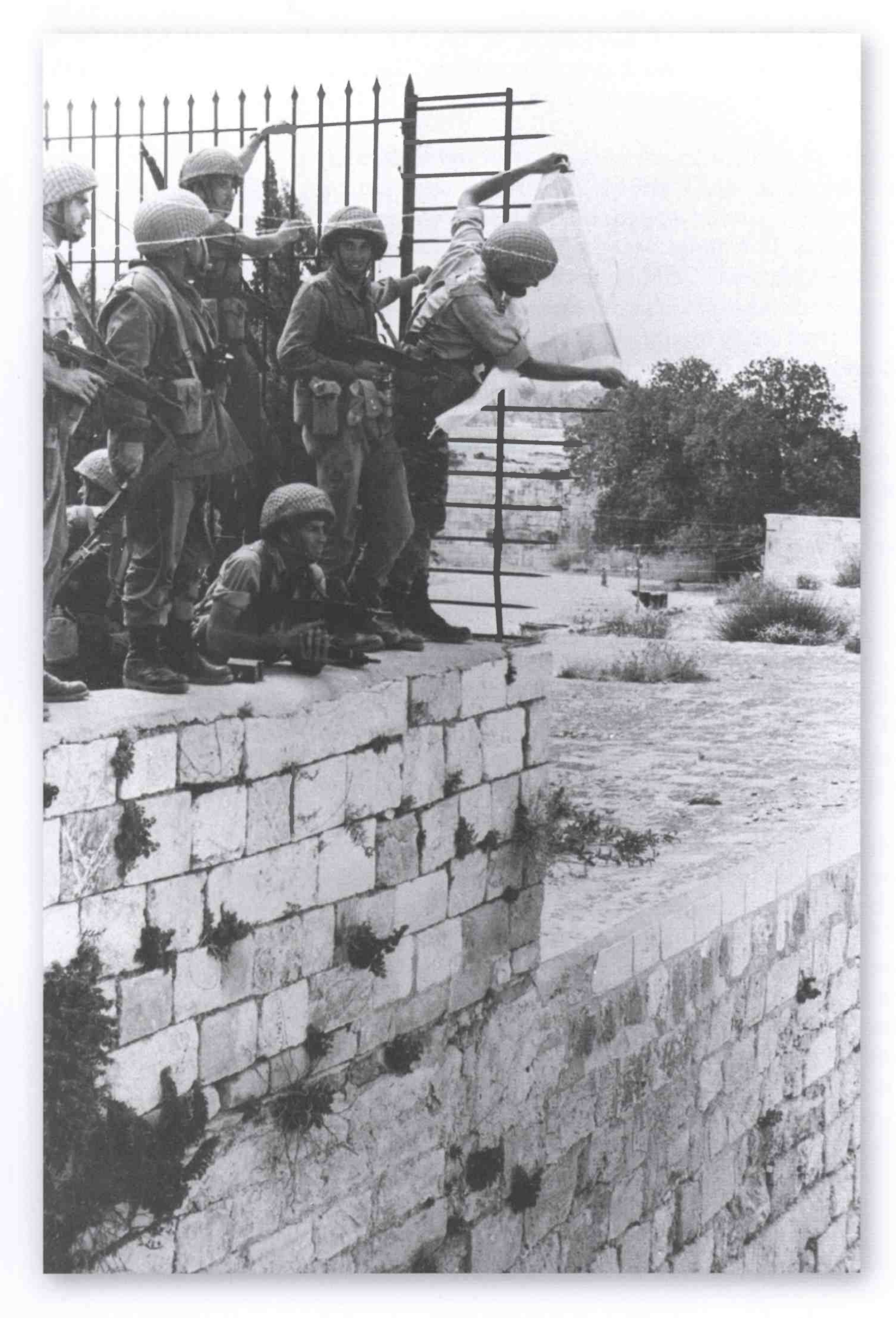
The true tragedy of the Six Day War was that the belligerents found it impossible to find any form of compromise or lasting peace so the region was condemned to another costly war in the Sinai and on the Golan Heights in October 1973 in the Yom Kippur War. (Photos by Terry Fincher/Getty Images)

Day War was a stunning military victory against seemingly overwhelming odds. Since the initial war aims were to confront Egypt alone, the outcome was as unexpected as it was comprehensive. This was due largely to the political miscalculations of Nasser that resulted in war, compounded by the lack of effective Arab coordination as well as the utter ineptitude and incompetence at the higher command levels of the military.

For the first time in its history, Israel gained the prize of defensible borders with the unprecedented luxury of strategic depth. Yet on 19 June 1967, the Israeli cabinet voted unanimously to return the whole of the Sinai to Egypt and the Golan Plateau to Syria in exchange for a lasting and binding peace agreement: the status of the West Bank and Jerusalem remained a separate issue. At a conference convened at Khartoum on 1 September 1967, such overtures were summarily dismissed by the Arab world with the passing of the 'three No's' resolution – No recognition of Israel; No negotiations with Israel; No peace with Israel. It was the legacy of the 'big lie'. The only explanation to the Arab street for the humiliating defeats suffered by Egypt, Jordan and Syria was the fabled military intervention by the US and Britain on behalf of the Israelis. Ironically, it changed American perceptions dramatically. For years, successive US governments had tried to be even-handed in their dealings with the Israelis and the Arabs, despite assiduous efforts by Israel to forge a special relationship with the USA. The 'big lie' did just that. It set the foundations for an enduring alliance between America and Israel to the lasting detriment of the Arab world. Soviet rearmament of Egypt

and Syria was countered by modern US equipment from M60 tanks to F4 fighter bombers turning Israel into a regional superpower with the political and military will to counter any perceived Arab threat.

In the days prior to the Six Day War, the Israeli people were deceived by their leaders that the fate of the nation was in real jeopardy on a par with the Holocaust. This was never the case but the extraordinary military victory changed the national psyche overnight. No longer was the country surrounded by hostile enemies at close quarters. The Biblical lands of Judaea and Samaria with their numerous holy places were now in Israeli hands.



Israeli paratroopers attach the Star of David national flag to iron railings above the Western Wall on the morning of Wednesday 7 June 1967 in the Old City of Jerusalem.

So too was the ultimate prize of Jerusalem and the Kotel, while the settlers in the Galilee Finger were at long last free from Syrian artillery bombardment. The IDF was held in the highest esteem and Israeli hubris grew accordingly. Politically, it soon became impossible for any Israeli Government to return these lands. As Nietzsche stated, 'War makes the victor stupid'. Similarly the people on the Arab street were deceived by their leaders about the prospect of victory over the 'Zionist entity'. Their faith in secular pan-Arabism or Ba'athism evaporated and Islam became the creed of choice. Nevertheless, the humiliation of defeat had to be expunged. The UN promulgated Resolution 242 for the exchange of the captured lands for peace but to no avail. The War of Attrition erupted along the Suez Canal while Syria repeatedly tested the Israeli forces on the Golan Plateau in a series of 'battle days'. The stage was set for yet another Arab-Israeli war.

THE BATTLEFIELD TODAY

Jerusalem has grown into a major metropolitan city since 1967 and much of the area where Col. Motta Gur's 55th Paratroop Brigade fought so tenaciously is hidden beneath new housing projects and urban highways criss-crossing the city. But there are a number of memorial sites that can be visited, notably that on 'Ammunition Hill'. There the Jordanian trenches and bunkers remain preserved and the attached museum contains fascinating audio-visual displays and a comprehensive record of the battle for Jerusalem. One can also follow the route of the Sherman tanks supporting Motta Gur's paratroops from the Rockefeller Museum, along the Old City Wall to the junction leading up to Mount Scopus and Augusta Victoria over which some of the fiercest battles raged in the city. Lion's Gate, through which Gur's paratroopers charged into the Old City remains virtually unchanged and is a much-visited location for military enthusiasts.

Farther west on a hill not far from the main road to Jerusalem is the Memorial of 'Radar Hill' where Col. Ben Ari's 10th Harel Mechanized Brigade fought. Also to the west of Jerusalem is the IDF Armored Corps Museum 'Yad L'shyrion' located in Latrun in the Ayalon Valley, between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. The outdoor exhibition grounds feature some 120 armoured fighting vehicles on display, ranging from the first French Hotchkiss tank of the IAC to recent models of the Merkava. There are also numerous American, British and captured Soviet AFVs on display. The museum's central building was formerly a British police station that was the scene of heavy fighting during the War of Independence.

On the Golan Heights much has changed since the Six Day War as Israeli agricultural settlements have proliferated including several fine vineyards and wineries. Most of the military memorials are devoted to the desperate struggle of the opening days of the Yom Kippur War of 1973 when the fate of Israel was put to its harshest test. However, there are some that record the exploits of the IDF in the Six Day War not least of which is at the pivotal position of Tel Fakhr. Many of the formidable trenches and bunkers have been retained as they were on capture. For years the complex of fortifications at Tel Fakhr rained artillery fire down on the Israeli settlements in the Huleh Valley and it was the 1st Golani Infantry Brigade that eventually captured the position at a considerable cost in casualties. Accordingly, the site is now called Mitzpe Golani or the Golani Lookout Post.

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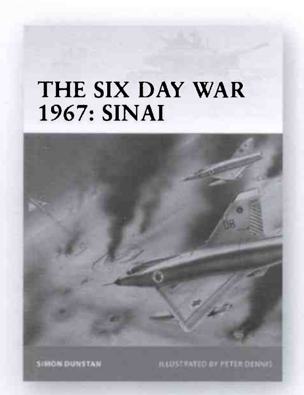
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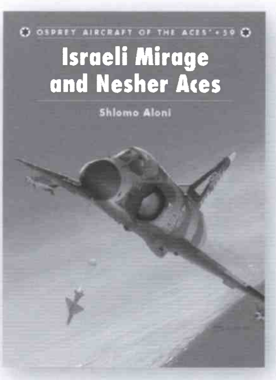
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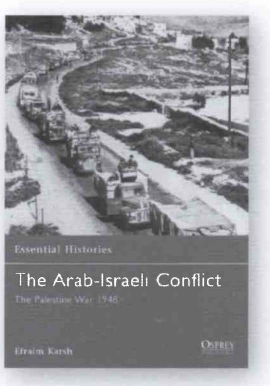
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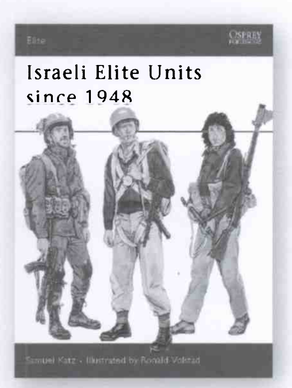
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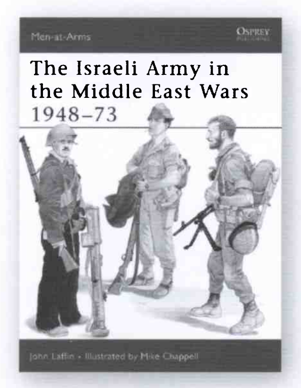
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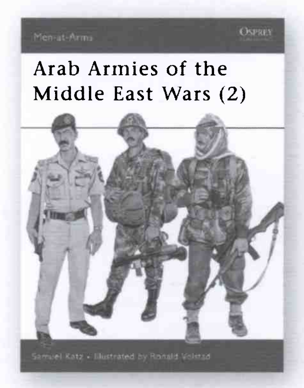
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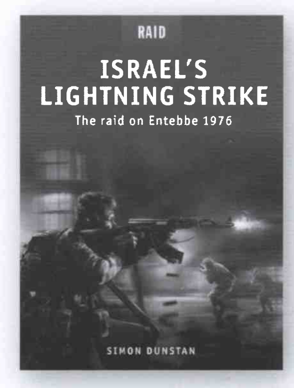
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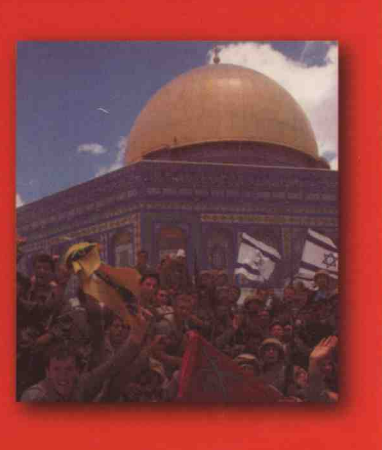
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